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ABSTRACT

Magnet schools are public schools that offer specialized subject themes or educational methodologies as a way of achieving desegregated student bodies. This document reports on a study of school districts in three communities--St. Louis (Missouri), Cincinnati (Ohio), and Nashville (Tennessee)--that have made wide use of magnets in meeting their obligations to desegregate schools. The focus was on whether these magnet schools served the educational needs and interests of poor and minority children. In St. Louis the study also examined another type of public school choice, a voluntary interdistrict city-to-suburb transfer program established by a consent decree. Findings of the extensive studies lead to the conclusion that the magnet schools and the St. Louis interdistrict program do meet the test of serving poor children when compared to what the children would have experienced otherwise. Without these schools, the children would not have received comparable educational opportunities. The Commission recommends the continued and expanded use of magnet schools and voluntary interdistrict transfer programs with appropriate safeguards. Part One of this document consists of the report and recommendations of the Commission. Part Two contains the technical summary reports prepared on the three school districts. Five appendixes provide supplemental information to the technical reports for the Cincinnati and St. Louis studies and two more appendixes supplement the technical report for the Nashville study. (Contains 4 tables, 12 graphs in appendixes, 32 tables in appendixes, and 36 references.) (SLD)

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Difficult Choices:

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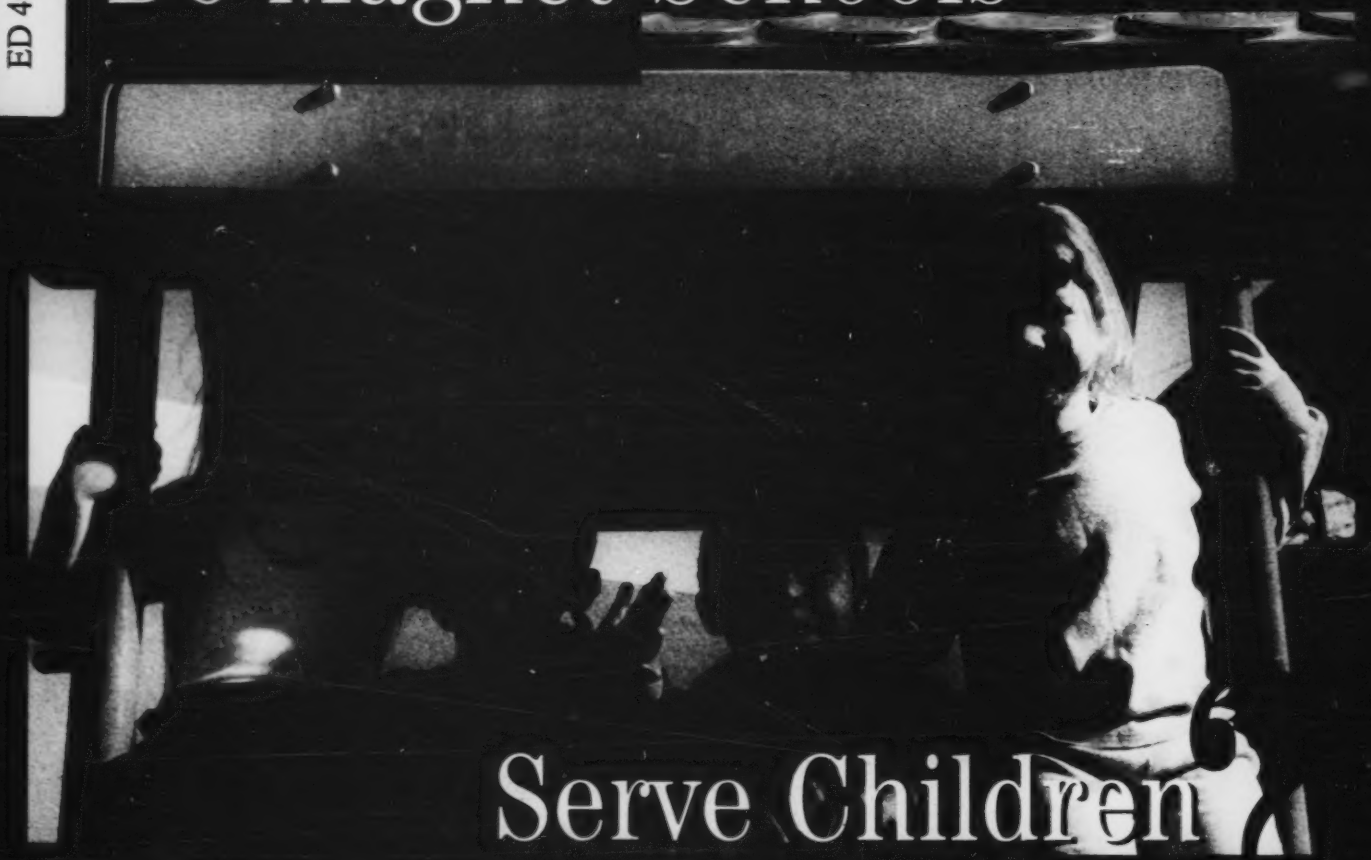
Do Magnet Schools Serve Children in Need



Report of the
Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights

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Difficult Choices:
Do Magnet Schools Serve Children in Need?

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with the assistance of
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Report of the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights

Spring 1997

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Foreword

This project is a collaborative effort between the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights and the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies.

The Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights is a bipartisan organization established in 1982 to monitor the civil rights policies and practices of the federal government and to seek ways to accelerate progress in the area of civil rights.

The Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies (VIPPS), established in 1975, provides a vehicle through which Vanderbilt University faculty work on public policy issues across academic disciplines, as well as a bridge into the wider community—local, regional, national, and international.

This study has two parts. Part One consists of the Report and Recommendations for the Commission. Part Two contains the technical summary reports prepared by VIPPS on the school districts in the three U.S. metropolitan areas studied, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Nashville.

The Commission and VIPPS gratefully acknowledge the support of the Spencer Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts for this study.

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Table of Contents

Part One: Report and Recommendations of the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights

Executive Summary 1

Chapter I
Introduction 5

Chapter II
A Profile of Magnet Schools 9
A. In the Nation
When Did They Begin?
How Widespread Are They?
What Methods of Selection Do They Use?
How Are They Financed?

B. In Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Nashville
Cincinnati
St. Louis
Nashville

Chapter III
Who Participates in the Magnets? 13
A. Desegregation
B. Socio-economic Status

Chapter IV
Why the Socio-economic Contrast in Participation? 17
A. Sources of Information
B. Reasons for Choices

Chapter V
Do Minority and Low-income Students Attending Magnets Derive Educational Benefits? 19
A. Performance on Standardized Tests and Other Measures
B. Graduation Rates

Chapter VI
What May Account for Improved Outcomes in Public Choice Programs? 23
A. Magnets
B. The St. Louis Interdistrict Program

Chapter VII
Conclusion 25

Chapter VIII
Findings and Recommendations 27

Endnotes 33

Part Two: Technical Summary Reports

Parental Choice: Consequences for Families, Students, and Schools
Technical Summary Report: Cincinnati and St. Louis 39
Appendix A 68
Appendix B 74
Appendix C 81
Appendix D 83
Appendix E 85

Parental Choice: Consequences for Families, Students, and Schools
Technical Summary Report: Nashville 89
Appendix F 107
Appendix G 112

Part One:

Report and Recommendations of the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights

Executive Summary

Introduction, Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations

"Choice" has become a catch-all description for a variety of initiatives that allow families to choose among public schools, rather than confining students to the public school in their immediate area of residence. This study, a collaboration between the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights and Vanderbilt University, examines various dynamics and outcomes of efforts to increase parental choice among public schools. While a robust debate about the theoretical merits and demerits of choice has been in progress for several years, what has been missing thus far in the debate is empirical evidence of the effects of increasing choice through public policy.

In this study we focus on what we believe provides the richest source of experience with which to answer the questions about choice: "magnet schools"—public schools which offer specialized subject themes or educational methodologies as a means of achieving desegregated student bodies. We studied school districts in three communities—St. Louis, Missouri; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Nashville, Tennessee—that have made wide use of magnets in meeting their obligations to desegregate schools. (In St. Louis, we also examined another type of public school choice—a voluntary interdistrict city to suburb transfer program established by a consent decree.)

Because most children who are not poor or subject to discrimination already have choice, our acid test of this (and, for that matter, all) species of choice proposals is whether they serve the educational needs and interests of poor and minority children. It is important to note that in applying this test we asked "compared to what?" If some minority and poor children have benefitted from choice policies, it may not be a fatal criticism that others have not. The question remains whether other policies would have provided gains for more students or whether choice policy may be reformed to extend benefits to greater numbers of minority and poor students.

We have concluded that the magnet schools and the St. Louis interdistrict program examined in this study *do* meet our "compared to what" test. In other words, absent these initiatives, it is very unlikely that minority and poor children would have received comparable educational opportunities—opportunities that have enabled many to succeed academically and to go on to college or productive employment.

Accordingly, the Commission recommends the continued and expanded use of magnet schools and of voluntary interdistrict transfer programs as *one* form of affording equal educational opportunity— with two important caveats. First, the programs must operate under safeguards designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged children are effectively informed of the opportunities and that every effort to minimize socio-economic isolation and other types of inequity be made. Second, government at every level must give priority to the needs of children who continue to attend schools in racial and socio-economic isolation. While these and the other specific recommendations the Commission offers will not provide panaceas, the Commission does believe that with proper implementation they can make an important contribution to the educational advancement of poor and minority students.

Chapter II

A Profile of Magnet Schools

Magnet schools, sometimes called "alternative schools" or "schools of choice," are public schools that provide incentives to parents and students through specialized expectations for students, curricular themes, or instructional methods. Typically, magnet school enrollment is regulated to ensure that

attendance is racially balanced. While some magnets have selective admission criteria, pupil assignment may be established through any combination of first-come, first-served application; lottery; and/or percentage set-asides for neighborhood residents.

Over the past 20 years, magnet schools have largely been used by urban school districts as a primary tool for achieving desegregation goals and encouraging innovation. In many instances, districts have supported magnet schools with a considerable investment of resources so as to increase their attractiveness and likelihood of success.

We examined school districts in three major U.S. metropolitan areas. In two of the cities—St. Louis, Missouri and Cincinnati, Ohio—the system of magnet schools is well-established, constituting a key element of each district's court-ordered desegregation plan. The suburban school districts in St. Louis are part of the largest city-to-suburbs voluntary transfer program in the nation. In Nashville, Tennessee, the small system of selective magnet schools, originally implemented as a part of the district's court-ordered desegregation plan and limited to students at the middle- and high-school levels, was expanded in 1993 to include several city-wide non-selective magnets. Nashville thus represents a system in transition from relatively limited parental choice to more extensive choice.

Chapter III

Who Participates in the Magnets?

Magnets in all three communities studied have been successful in creating desegregated schools. In Cincinnati and Nashville, the percentage of black students enrolled in the magnet programs is roughly the same as the total percentage of black students in the district. In St. Louis, a combination of magnet schools, interdistrict transfers, and a small number of integrated neighborhood schools also has resulted in a high percentage of resident black public students attending desegregated schools.

But despite efforts to inform and attract students from poor families, poor children remain more highly concentrated in non-magnet than in magnet schools.

In all three communities, for example, the parents of children in magnet schools have higher income and educational levels than those in non-magnets. Children in magnet schools are more likely than non-magnet children to live in two-parent households where at least one parent is employed. In both Cincinnati and Nashville, children in non-magnets are more likely to qualify for free lunch programs, an indicator of poverty. (In St. Louis, however, a significant number of children participating in the magnet program are eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program.)

These positive correlations between magnet school attendance and higher socio-economic status hold true when the comparison is limited to minority parents. Accordingly, the higher socio-economic status of magnet school parents is not simply a result of white children of higher status choosing these schools. Rather, it also appears that in these three communities, when minority parents are given a choice, those of higher socio-economic status are more likely to choose magnet schools than those who are poorer and less educated.

Chapter IV

Why the Socio-economic Contrast in Participation?

The lower participation rates of low-income families in magnet schools in the three communities studied is not a result of the failure of the school districts to provide information about magnet opportunities. The districts studied use many techniques of affirmative outreach (such as newsletters, brochures, advertising campaigns) in an effort to make parents and students aware of the program. However, the research showed that higher income parents have available to them a wider variety of sources of information than low-income families. Access to people knowledgeable about schools either through their social networks or contacts at the workplace often gives middle class parents a basis for choice not available to those less well-off. Higher income families who have cars and flexible work hours are better able than others to visit schools before making a choice.

Parents' reasons for choosing a particular

school also differ by social class. In both Cincinnati and St. Louis, for example, higher income parents are more likely than others to cite academic reputation as a reason for choosing their child's school. By contrast, lower income parents are more likely to list the availability of transportation or their child's need for individual or specialized help as factors in school choice.

The reasons parents choose a particular school also breaks down along racial lines in some cases. For example, white parents in all three communities cite teachers as one of the main factors for choosing a school. Minority parents in all three communities are more likely than whites to choose a school based on its racial/ethnic mix.

Chapter V

Do Minority and Low-Income Students Attending Magnets Derive Educational Benefits?

Data obtained from school districts in preparing the Commission's report suggest that low-income students in magnet schools generally do better on measures of academic performance than their counterparts at non-magnet schools. Additional evidence in Cincinnati and St. Louis suggest this may be the case even when differences in the socio-economic status of students are taken into account. Evidence in St. Louis also suggests that low-income students who participate in the magnet program and the interdistrict transfer program are significantly more likely to complete high school than their counterparts in non-magnet schools.

However, studies of other school districts that employ magnets or other forms of choice have been mixed in their assessment of the gains for minority and low-income students. Thus, while there is some evidence that magnet school attendance brings benefits to low-income and minority students, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Chapter VI

What May Account for Improved Outcomes in Public Choice Programs?

A number of factors that may account for the greater success of minority and poor children in magnet schools emerged from this study.

For example, magnets are often successful in attracting strong educational leaders as principals. These principals are often afforded a level of autonomy in recruiting and hiring teachers which enables them to seek teachers with special experience and, perhaps more important, a commitment to the goals of the magnet school.

In turn, magnet teachers often have more autonomy than their counterparts in non-magnet schools in shaping curriculum and the type of instruction. In St. Louis and Cincinnati, magnet schools have attracted more teachers with advanced degrees than non-magnet schools.

Other potential reasons for the improved outcomes in magnet schools are greater parental involvement and greater resources. In all three communities, magnet school parents were more likely to report a supportive school climate than non-magnet parents.

Improved outcomes for poor and minority children in the St. Louis interdistrict program may be attributed in part to their attendance at schools marked by higher expectations where academic success and college attendance are the norms. These schools also provide less advantaged children with access to contacts and practical know-how that furnish an entree to middle class society.

Finally, magnets often command more resources and higher budgets than non-magnets.

Chapter I

Introduction

By most (although not all)[1] accounts, American public education is in deep trouble—failing for large numbers of students in its major missions of preparing them for productive employment and readying them to take on the responsibilities of informed, participating citizens.

The perceived problems in public education have given rise to a variety of proposed remedies. One proposed set of reforms (generally labeled "standards-based reform") focuses on establishing high standards for all students, improving the quality of teaching, developing better instruments for assessing what students know and can do, and holding school officials accountable for the performance of students.

Other reformers zero in on issues of governance, arguing for site-based management, a devolution of more authority to individual schools, and measures designed to get parents more involved in the education of their children. Still others focus on issues of equity and opportunity—calling for steps to redress the massive maldistribution of resources that flows from property tax–driven school finance systems, or pointing to research showing the harmful effects of racial and socio-economic isolation in the schools.

These reforms are not mutually exclusive and some educators embrace most or all of them.

Increasingly, however, over the past decade, the political debate about the future of public education has come to be driven if not dominated by another issue—that of "choice."

Choice as an issue in public education has been used to describe a variety of initiatives. In its most pristine form, choice calls for using public money to support private education, by distributing funds to families to assist them in enrolling their children in private schools. But choice can also mean employing one or more devices that allow families to choose among public schools, rather than confining students to the public school in their immediate area of residence. It may also embody the creation of hybrid forms which allow the establishment of "charter" schools that operate within the ambit of the public school system but are run by groups of teachers or others involved in education with very little regulation by the state.[2]

The arguments offered in favor of choice proposals are several. Public education suffers, choice advocates say, because of its status as a virtual monopoly. Introducing competition, the argument runs, will produce the same kinds of advantages that operate in the private economic market—encouraging quality, innovation, and efficiency and driving out those who are unwilling or unable to compete. Other arguments that proponents use center on the presumed benefits of affording parents more control over the education of their children and of creating communities of shared values in the schools.

Increasingly, however, another argument is being heard in the political debate. Choice should be embraced in the name of fairness, proponents say, because it will provide the less affluent with what the affluent already have—control over the quality of education their children receive. After all, the argument runs, wealthy people can send their children to elite private schools or move to suburban areas where their children can go to the best public schools. Those who are not well-off are constrained in their choices of housing and in most places must

accept whatever education is afforded at the neighborhood school.

It is this "fairness" argument (along with claims that competition will improve the efficacy of schools) that has particularly engaged the attention of the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights. In assessing the validity of this and other arguments, what struck us was that most of the current debate was being conducted on a theoretical plane. Many of the participants in the debate have acted as though there were a factual vacuum and conclusions had to be based on logic and inference rather than on experience.

But that is not so. For two decades now, school districts around the country have established and conducted "magnet schools"—public schools which offer specialized subject themes or educational methodologies as a means of achieving desegregated student bodies. While magnets are a species of public school choice designed to achieve a targeted purpose—meeting constitutional or policy requirements to end racial isolation—the Commission believed that examination of the magnet experience would yield information relevant to the broader debate. So, with the help of social scientists at Vanderbilt University, we set out to examine in depth the experience of three communities—St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Nashville—that have made wide use of magnets in meeting their obligations to desegregate schools. In St. Louis, the researchers also looked at another kind of public school choice—a voluntary interdistrict transfer program established by a consent decree—under which some 13,000 black students from the City of St. Louis attend public schools in 16 suburban districts in St. Louis County. This research is cited collectively herein as "the Vanderbilt Study"and is contained in the technical reports set forth in Part Two of this report.

As detailed in the Vanderbilt Study,[3] the three districts furnished a great deal of factual information to the Vanderbilt researchers, data which was supplemented by surveys and interviews with school administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

The result is a study which the Commission believes will help make the debate about choice more informed.

In undertaking the study, we did not think that any of the data obtained could help make a case for vouchers for private school education. The defects of voucher proposals are deep and fundamental. Little thought has been given by proponents to the impact that vouchers would have on one of the major purposes of establishing a system of public education—to serve as a social balance wheel that transmits common values and serves as a unifying force in American society.[4] The need to find common ground and a sense of national purpose has hardly dissipated as the nation struggles again to deal with the impact of immigration and other changes in American society. The fragmentation of education that vouchers would promote would make the search for common ground more difficult if not impossible. Nor have proponents of vouchers offered any convincing way to avoid the entanglement of religion and government that would result.

Beyond this, the notion that voucher proposals would serve primarily to afford choice to the poor does not survive scrutiny of the proposals themselves. The subsidies provided by voucher programs are ordinarily not enough to allow low-income families to participate at all. For example, a recent Congressional proposal for vouchers for District of Columbia students that did not become law would have furnished up to $3,000 per child, which is insufficient to meet the tuition at many private schools.[5]

Nor is transportation, a key need for low-income families, ordinarily provided. Furthermore, voucher proposals fail to address the higher costs of educating disabled children or children with other special needs. Indeed, voucher proposals would result in skimming off the more advantaged and better prepared students from the public schools, leaving the schools with even higher concentrations of poor and special needs children and fewer resources to do the job.

The same criticisms do not apply, however, to choice programs within public school systems. These initiatives do not impinge on the mission of the pub-

lic schools to transmit common values; they do not raise troubling constitutional issues of church and state. Nor on its face does public school choice raise the issue of excluding or limiting participation of the poor since all students remain in public schools. Transfers of funds out of public education are not involved.

Yet, on these last points—participation and the allocation of resources—questions must be raised. Do particular forms of choice meet the educational needs of those who need the most care and attention—children who come to school from backgrounds of discrimination and disadvantage? Since the quality of education children receive often depends on how they are classified within the system, do choice programs sort children out in ways that are harmful to some? These are difficult questions. The experience of both those who participate and those who do not must be examined. As in other areas of public policy, the question must be asked about school choice: "compared to what?" If some minority and poor children have benefitted from choice policies, it may not be a fatal criticism that others have not been helped. The question remains whether other policies would have provided gains for more students or whether choice policy may be reformed to extend benefits to greater numbers of minority and poor students .

The evidence in this study, as the reader will see, is mixed. At the conclusion, the Commission offers some recommendations designed largely to reform the reform, that is, to ensure that choice policies extend educational opportunities to greater numbers of poor children. The recommendations will not provide panaceas. But they may help us navigate the shoals of school choice in a way that helps ensure that disadvantaged children are the beneficiaries, not the victims, of the latest set of reforms.

Chapter II

A Profile of Magnet Schools

A. In the Nation

When did they begin?

Magnet schools with their use of specialized curricula or specific instructional approaches can trace their roots to district-wide specialty schools, such as the Bronx High School of Science in New York City, founded at the turn of the century. But the term "magnet" gained currency during the 1970s when educators were searching for ways to make school desegregation more attractive to parents. By allowing parents to select among several desegregated schools offering different subject specialties or teaching methodologies, school districts hoped to present a more palatable alternative to mandatory reassignment to a particular school in which parents had no say.

How widespread are they?

Since the acceptance by Federal courts of magnet programs as a method of desegregation in 1975,[6] the number of magnet schools has increased rapidly. Between 1982 and 1991, the number of individual schools offering magnet programs nearly doubled and the number of students enrolled in these programs almost tripled. By the 1991-92 school year more than 1.2 million students were enrolled in magnet schools in 230 school districts.[7]

Magnet schools are mainly an urban phenomenon. According to the U.S. Department of Education, more than half of the large urban school districts have magnet school programs as compared with only 10% of suburban districts.[8] Although magnets can and do encompass all grade levels, more than half are located in elementary schools. Only one-fifth are at the high school level.[9]

What methods of selection do they use?

In spite of this growth, demand is still greater than the supply in more than three-quarters of the school districts that have magnet programs. Recently, more than 123,000 students were on waiting lists for specific magnet programs.[10] Since most school districts must limit the number of students enrolling in the magnet programs, the admissions process is important. Most districts use a lottery format. Others operate on a first-come, first-served basis. Only about a third of the schools use selection criteria.[11] These criteria can range from test scores or auditions to preference for children with siblings already in attendance.

How are they financed?

Districts finance magnet schools the same way that they finance other public schools. However, on average magnet schools spend about $200 more per student than non-magnet schools. In some districts the amount is considerably more, for example, in Houston, where magnet schools spend from $400 to $1,300 more per student.[12]

Some magnet schools, such as those in the Los Angeles Unified School District, receive state desegregation funds.[13] Federal funding under the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) is also available. MSAP has provided two-year grants to magnet programs that are implemented (either voluntarily or through court order) to promote desegregation. The grants have funded expansion of current magnet programs as well as the creation of new magnet programs. Between 1985 and 1993, $739.5 million was distributed to 117 different school districts.[14]

The magnet schools in the St. Louis Public School District received on average 30% more per student than the average public school.[15] Neither the Nashville nor the Cincinnati school district records this type of comparative information.

B. In Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Nashville

Cincinnati

Magnet schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, known as "alternative schools," were initially established after the filing of a desegregation lawsuit in 1974 and substantially expanded under a 1984 court order resulting from the settlement of the case.[16] The district consists of 85 schools, including 61 elementary, 8 middle, 10 secondary, and 7 special schools. In the 1993-94 school year alternative programs were available at 44 different school sites. Acceptance into the magnet programs is on a first-come, first-served basis, with racial balance maintained at each school to assist the district in reaching its court-ordered desegregation goals. The district has two basic types of alternative programs: dedicated magnets where all the students in the school are enrolled in the magnet curriculum, and schools-within-schools, where the magnet curriculum is offered in a non-magnet school. Total enrollment for the district in the 1993-94 school year was approximately 51,000, with 33,660 black students, 16,320 white students, and 1,020 students of other races. Approximately 23,460 students were enrolled in the magnet programs.

Transportation is provided for kindergarten through eighth grade for all students who live more than a mile away from their alternative school. The school district also provides transportation assistance for all high school students.

For the 1992-93 school year, the Cincinnati Public School District published a brochure entitled "Parent's Guide for Understanding the Application Process" and revised the Alternative School Application form. The application was sent to 55,000 families in the district who had children in public, private, or parochial schools. Brochures describing individual schools were also mailed out to targeted mailing lists. Public service announcements on the alternative school system, as well as various individual magnet schools, were aired on local television stations.

St. Louis

The St. Louis magnet program was first established in 1975, also under a consent decree in a school desegregation case. Although the remedy in the decree was later broadened as the result of an intervention by the NAACP, the magnet school program was continued by a court order in 1980 and later as a component of the settlement agreement of 1983, which also included a voluntary interdistrict transfer program with St. Louis County school districts. During the 1993-94 school year, the district had 104 schools with 28 magnet programs (26 full-time and 2 part-time) spanning all grade levels.[17] Magnets focus on different curricula and/or instructional approaches, including visual and performing arts, early childhood, math and science, and gifted education. As in Cincinnati, the settlement provides that a number of the magnet schools are to be located in the inner-city so they are accessible to disadvantaged neighborhoods.[18] The magnet schools are open to any student in the city, as well as to white students from the 16 suburbs that participate in the interdistrict transfer program. Racial balance is maintained in the magnet schools so that none has an enrollment that is more than 60% or less than 50% black.[19] Acceptance is based on a general lottery. In St. Louis, there are still non-integrated and integrated non-magnet schools. As of October 1995, 18,033 students attended non-integrated schools, 11,322 attended integrated schools, and 11,881 attended magnet schools.[20]

The district also participates in an interdistrict transfer program which allows black city students to attend suburban schools. Although this is not a "magnet program," the Commission and the Vanderbilt social scientists decided to include it in the study as a species of public school choice worth examination. This program provides transportation to all who participate. The city-to-county students are eligible if

they come from a school that is more than half black, are not full-time special education students, and do not have behavior problems.

The 16 suburban districts, most of which had few minority students when the settlement was reached in 1983, obligated themselves to accept transfers until 25% of their enrollment was black. Some 13,000 students are now enrolled in the program and several of the school districts have met or exceeded the 25%. The settlement agreement also called for the creation of a Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council (VICC) to implement and monitor the interdistrict student and teacher transfer programs. VICC consists of 27 voting members—one person representing each school district, one person representing the NAACP, one person representing the Liddell plaintiff group, and one person representing the State Department of Education. The Council appointed Susan Uchitelle as its executive director. She and her staff carry out such day-to-day operations of VICC as disseminating information (advertising campaigns), recruiting students, processing applications, collecting data, and keeping records.[21]

To recruit for the 1993-94 school year (the year of the Vanderbilt Study), VICC sent five mailings to families of eligible city students. Priority letters, including a recruitment brochure, a return envelope, and an application, were sent to more than 2,000 eligible city students who had applied unsuccessfully the year before. A general "Schools of Choice" recruitment brochure and application forms were sent to more than 22,000 city students in January. VICC then mailed three follow-up flyers in April, June, and July. Information was also sent to various institutions, including churches, doctors' offices, neighborhood associations, public libraries, and day-care centers. VICC also ran advertising campaigns on radio stations and in various newspapers. In addition, VICC personnel staffed information booths at various gatherings, including a neighborhood festival and the Missouri Black Expo. A total of $52,927 was spent on recruitment of city students and information dissemination about the voluntary interdistrict transfer program.[22]

VICC, in conjunction with the St. Louis Public School system, used many of the same techniques to recruit county students to attend city magnet schools. In addition to radio and print advertisements, VICC also used television advertisements for specific magnet programs. Individual tours of specific schools were also provided. VICC targeted new families by utilizing Welcome Wagon hostesses to deliver magnet school application brochures. A total of $96,586 was spent by VICC on county student recruitment and information dissemination. The St. Louis Public School District spent an additional $22,028.[23]

Nashville

The Metropolitan Nashville Public School System created its magnet school program in 1983 pursuant to a court order.[24] The district, which during the 1993-94 school year had 119 schools, conducts 3 academic magnet schools founded in the early to mid-1980s, as well as 3 magnet programs specializing in arts or literature and a Paideia program established during the 1993-94 school year. These latter programs were set up in existing schools, creating a school-within-school system. The academic magnet schools allow all students who meet certain academic requirements to enter a lottery for the available spots in the program. To meet racial integration guidelines, two different pools were established—one for black students and one for white students. The newer magnet programs also use a lottery system to admit students. The school district did not offer transportation to students enrolled in either the dedicated or school-within-school magnet programs in the 1993-94 school year.

The outreach system in Nashville at the time of the study was minimal. For the four academic magnets, the school district sent a letter of invitation to all students with qualifying test scores. For the newer magnets, brochures and applications were distributed to all schools. A notice that information about the magnets was available was included in most students report cards. Since that time, Nashville has received a grant to institute a formal, more extensive recruitment program for its magnet schools.[25]

Chapter III

Who Participates in the Magnets?

Magnets in all of the cities studied have been successful in creating desegregated schools. But despite the efforts made (particularly in Cincinnati and St. Louis) to inform and attract students from poor families, poor children remain more highly concentrated in non-magnet schools.

A. Desegregation

In all three communities studied, magnets have helped to achieve a high degree of racial desegregation.[26] In Cincinnati and Nashville, the percentage of black students enrolled in the magnet programs is roughly the same as the total percentage of black students in the district. In Cincinnati during the 1993-94 school year, approximately 66% of the 51,000 students in the public school system were black. Of the children enrolled in the system's magnet school program, 61.7% were black. In Nashville, the total district enrollment was 39% black, whereas the magnet school enrollment was 39.9% black.

In St. Louis, desegregation was more difficult to achieve. At the beginning of the litigation in the mid-1970s, the city schools were more than 80% black. But a combination of magnet schools, interdistrict transfers, and a small number of integrated neighborhood schools has resulted, according to one study, in nearly 60% (or more than 26,000) of resident black public school students attending a desegregated school.[27] Moreover, city magnets and the transfer program have resulted in more than 40,000 white students in the St. Louis area attending desegregated schools.

B. Socio-economic Status

In the three cities examined, as detailed in the Vanderbilt Study, the racial desegregation achieved through magnet programs has not been matched by a comparable degree of socio-economic desegregation.

In Cincinnati, for example, parents who choose magnet schools have higher income and educational levels than those who do not. The children in these schools are more likely than non-magnet children to live in two-parent households where at least one parent is employed. The children in non-magnets are more likely to qualify for free lunch, an indicator of poverty (see Table 1).

In Nashville, the same correlation between magnet attendance and higher socio-economic status occurs. The parents who choose magnet schools have higher educational and income levels than the parents who choose non-magnets or the non-magnet curricula of the school-within-school programs. For example, parents who do not choose magnets are almost five times as likely to have an income under $15,000. As in Cincinnati, the students in magnet school programs are more likely to have parents who are married and employed. Dedicated magnet school populations have the smallest proportion of students eligible for free lunch (see Table 2).

These patterns appear, although to a lesser degree, in St. Louis. Magnet school parents are more likely to have higher educational and income levels than parents whose children attend either integrated or non-integrated non-magnets. Again, as in Nashville and Cincinnati, students in magnet programs are more likely to come from two-parent families where at least one parent is employed. It is noteworthy,

Table 1: Summary of Socio-economic Status of Parents in Cincinnati

Income Levels

	Below $15,000
Magnet	24.9%
Non-magnet	43.7%

Educational Levels

	College Degree	Graduate Degree
Magnet	21.2%	18%
Non-magnet	11.9%	7%

Free Lunch

	Qualified for Free Lunch
Magnet	49% (on average)
Non-magnet	80% (on average)

Family Structure

	Married	Single, Never Married
Magnet	63.0%	9.7%
Non-magnet	44.5%	20.4%

Both Parents Unemployed

Magnet	12.6%
Non-magnet	25.7%

however, that in St. Louis, a significant number of children participating in the magnet program are low income. Seventy-one percent of the magnet school respondents to the survey are eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program (see Table 3).

These correlations between magnet attendance and higher socio-economic status are equally, if not more, apparent when the comparison is limited to minority parents. For example, in Nashville, minority parents who choose dedicated magnet schools are more than twice as likely to be college graduates or have advanced degrees (66% to 30.5%). In the school-within-school magnet programs, 55.8% of the minority parents have college or advanced degrees, compared with 22.5% of the minority parents in the school-within-school non-magnet programs. In St. Louis, minority children in magnet schools are more than twice as likely as their non-magnet counterparts (in both integrated and non-integrated schools) to have parents who are married. In Cincinnati, minority parents who opt for magnet schools are almost three times as likely to have an income of more than $50,000 than those who choose non-magnets.

Accordingly, the higher socio-economic status of magnet school parents is not simply a result of white families of higher status choosing those schools. It appears in these three communities that when minority parents are given a choice, those of higher socio-economic status are more likely to choose magnet schools than those who are poorer and less educated.

Table 2: Summary of Socio-economic Status of Parents in Nashville

Income Levels

	Below $15,000
Dedicated magnet	3.6%
Non-magnet	16.1%
SWS magnet*	5.6%
SWS non-magnet*	29.6%

Educational Levels

	No High School Diploma	College Degree	Graduate Degree
Dedicated magnet	1.0%	33.3%	36.3%
Non-magnet	5.6%	27.3%	27.0%
SWS magnet*	2.2%	24.4%	34.4%
SWS non-magnet*	16.9%	17.9%	5.3%

Free Lunch

	Qualified for Free Lunch
Dedicated magnet	6.3%
Non-magnet	35.0%
SWS magnet & non-magnet (combined)*	51.0%

Family Structure

	Married	Single, Never Married
Dedicated magnet	76.0%	2.5%
Non-magnet	61.3%	6.7%
SWS magnet*	68.3%	9.6%
SWS non-magnet*	54.7%	13.2%

Both Parents Unemployed

Dedicated Magnet	0%
Non-magnet	8.2%
SWS magnet*	1.9%
SWS non-magnet*	13.2%

*School-within-school

Table 3: Summary of Socio-economic Status of Parents in St. Louis

Income Levels

	Below $15,000
Magnet	32.2%
Integrated non-magnet	67.5%
Non-integrated	62.7%

Educational Levels

	College Degree	Graduate Degree
Magnet	22.4%	11.0%
Integrated non-magnet	7.5%	2.7%
Non-integrated	11.3%	4.0%

Free Lunch

	Qualified for Free Lunch
Magnet	71%
Integrated non-magnet	95%
Non-integrated	97%

Family Structure

	Married	Single, Never Married
Magnet	55.0%	13.0%
Integrated non-magnet	26.5%	33.2%
Non-integrated	21.3%	43.6%

Both Parents Unemployed

Magnet	11.3%
Integrated non-magnet	38.2%
Non-integrated	39.8%

Chapter IV

Why the Socio-economic Contrast in Participation?

A. Sources of Information

The lower participation rates of low-income families in magnet schools in the three communities studied is not a result of the failure of the school districts to provide information about magnet opportunities. As indicated in the last chapter, the districts use techniques of affirmative outreach (such as newsletters, brochures, advertising campaigns) in an effort to make parents and students aware of the program. In fact, lower income parents in St. Louis and Cincinnati are more likely to use a school newsletter as a source of information in making decisions than higher income parents.[28] The problem lies in the fact that higher income parents have a wide variety of sources of information available to them, while some lower income parents apparently are not reached by any of the modes of communication currently in use.

One advantage that many higher income families have is that they are more likely than lower income families to have cars and flexible work hours. This may help explain the fact that in Cincinnati, for example, parents with high income are twice as likely as others to visit schools before making a decision.

Another very important distinction is that middle class parents often have access to information through broad informal social networks.[29] These networks, largely unavailable to the poor, are significant sources of information for parents making school choices.

For example, the Vanderbilt Study showed that in Cincinnati, the higher the income level, the more likely the parents are to use discussions with teachers and friends as sources of information. One mother in Cincinnati cited discussions with other parents at soccer practice as an important source of information about schools. Another woman asked a neighbor who teaches for the school district.[30] The workplace also is source of information to many parents. For example, in explaining her decision to send her child to a magnet school, a Head Start director in Cincinnati stated:

> *The only reason that I know as much as I do is not just because I'm a concerned parent. There are a lot of concerned parents out there. The only reason I know is because I'm a part of [the school] system.... I can ask the kinds of questions to get the information that I need to help me make informed decisions.*[31]

Also, parents in jobs which afford broader contact with the public may have access to more information about schools. Thus, for example, a beautician in one of the communities studied became familiar with magnet schools after talking with several of her customers:

> *One of my customers is a public school teacher. I talked with her about the international studies magnet. We have a lot of teachers that come to the shop so I got to know a little about the magnet schools. One of my customers works for the board of education and she brought me an application, so I just sent it in. [My information] came from word of mouth...We all have children and they know people and we always talk.*[32]

Parents who do not have the social networks provided by jobs or friendly, safe neighborhoods tell different stories. Often these parents work at jobs that do not create social networks (such as night shift or solitary jobs) or are unemployed.

In some cases, however, detailed information was not necessary for parents to make magnet choices. One unemployed mother of three admitted she did not know much about the magnet program in which she enrolled her daughter. She chose the program because she "felt it was a better neighborhood and a better school to go to than where they would have had to go."[33] Another parent responded, "It wasn't really that I was running to something good as I was running away from something I knew was not good."[34]

B. Reasons for Choices

Parents' reasons for choosing a school also differ among social classes. In both Cincinnati and St. Louis, higher income parents are more likely than others to cite academic reputation as a reason for choosing their child's school.

Percentages of Cincinnati parents listing academic reputation as a factor in school choice, by income level, are as follows:

- 63.8% of high-income parents
- 67.3% of medium-high–income parents
- 55.7% of medium-income parents
- 50.0% of low-income parents

Percentages of St. Louis parents listing academic reputation as a factor in school choice, by income level, are as follows:

- 74.2% of high-income parents
- 55.2% of medium-high–income parent
- 42.0% of medium-income parents
- 26.1% of low-income parents[35]

By contrast, lower income parents in all three communities frequently list proximity to the home as a reason for choosing a particular school. In St. Louis, many low-income respondents also list the availability of transportation and the student's need for individual help. In Cincinnati, low-income parents are more likely than others to choose a child's school because of a student's need for specialized or individual help or the availability of transportation. By contrast, high-income parents in Cincinnati are more likely to choose a child's school for its academic reputation or its principal.

In some cases, the reasons parents choose a particular school also differ depending on race. In all three cities studied, minority parents are more likely to choose a school based on its racial/ethnic mix. In St. Louis, minority parents also look at the opportunities for parental involvement and the values of the school. In Cincinnati, minority parents are more concerned with the availability of special help and transportation. In Nashville, minority parents are more likely than white parents to choose a dedicated magnet for reasons of safety or opportunities for parental involvement. White parents in all three cities cite teachers as one of the main factors for choosing a school.

Chapter V

Do Minority and Low-Income Students Attending Magnets Derive Educational Benefits?

Surprisingly little systematic research has been done on the education outcomes associated with magnet schools. But data obtained from the three communities studied here indicate that minority and low-income students do derive benefits from magnet school attendance.

A. Performance on Standardized Tests and Other Measures

One such indicator is the performance of students on standardized achievement tests. In St. Louis, magnet students substantially outperform non-magnet students on state assessments in reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. (Data on St. Louis Public Schools performance on the Missouri Mastery Achievement Tests (MMAT) are on file with the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights.) Even a critic of desegregation who generally believes that schools can have little impact on educational outcomes nevertheless testified recently that magnet school students perform better than would be predicted from their prior ability and socio-economic background.[36] In Cincinnati, although no studies have been conducted that control for socio-economic status, magnet schools with substantial numbers of disadvantaged students in the student body performed above average on standardized tests.[37] For example, at Cheviot Spanish and Carson Montessori, two schools where more than half the students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch, more than half the students were above grade level in both reading and mathematics in 1994.

Another example is Eastwood Paideia, an elementary magnet with a population 66% black and 45% poor, which had 78.6% of its students reading above grade level and 88.3% performing above grade level in mathematics in 1994, an indicator that substantial numbers of poor children are doing reasonably well academically.

In Cincinnati, comparisons between magnet and non-magnet schools with similar proportions of students receiving school lunch can also be made. For example, Fairview German, a magnet school, and Kilgour, a non-magnet, have almost equal proportions (about 39%) of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch. At Fairview, 4% more students test at or above the national norm in reading and more than 6% in math than at Kilgour. This was the case even though Kilgour is the highest achieving non-magnet in the sample, with 72.5% of its students at or above the national norm in reading and 78.6% in math. The magnet College Hill and non-magnet Losantiville Elementary, each with about 46% of their students receiving free or reduced price lunch, present a more dramatic comparison. Twenty percent more students test at or above the national norm at the College Hill magnet school than at the non-magnet Losantiville.

Studies of other school districts that employ magnets or other forms of choice have been mixed in their assessment of the gains for minority and low-income students. On the positive side, one group of analysts, using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS)[38] conducted in 1988 and 1990 concluded:

> *Perhaps the most noteworthy effects suggested by the data are those related to magnet schools.*

Table 4: Performance on Achievement Tests in Reading and Math (Cincinnati, 1994)—Magnets versus Non-magnets

Magnets

School	Reading	Math	% Black	1992-93 % School Lunch
Eastwood Paideia	78.6	88.3	66.4	45.1
Fairview German	76.4	85.3	44.3	39.6
Sands Montessori	72.7	74.8	48.1	29.2
College Hill	67.1	78.7	64.0	46.7
Academy World Language	60.2	60.3	52.6	—
Cheviot Spanish	59.6	62.1	45.9	53.0
Carson Montessori	54.0	58.8	46.6	53.2
Quebec Heights	47.7	68.0	52.2	70.2
Roberts Paideia	42.6	60.9	52.1	75.8

Non-magnets

School	Reading	Math	% Black	1992-93 % School Lunch
Kilgour	72.5	78.6	45.7	39.2
Hyde Park	46.3	58.4	64.1	67.0
Westwood Elementary	42.8	61.9	29.9	34.4
Losantiville Elementary	43.6	55.0	87.3	46.5
Whittier Elementary	40.1	57.3	37.5	96.8
Washburn Elementary	28.8	50.5	79.8	100.0
Oyler	25.7	41.7	44.3	100.0
Central Fairmont	25.4	40.0	63.0	78.3
Washington Park	22.1	35.7	67.7	100.0
Roosevelt	16.0	29.2	64.4	92.3

Source: Achievement data provided by Cincinnati Public School System.

These schools seem to show slightly higher tenth grade achievement levels, as well as plans for further education, than their students' backgrounds would suggest. In the area of mathematics, students in these schools show a correspondingly higher proportion taking college preparatory mathematics.[39]

These analysts also found that minority and low-income children were overrepresented nationwide in magnet schools and other "schools of choice."[40]

Another study based on the NELS data compared achievement rates among public magnet and public comprehensive schools and concluded that "[m]agnet schools are more likely to serve disadvantaged students than comprehensive schools."[41] The study also found that low-income or minority students were more likely to go to a magnet school than high-income or white children.[42] Moreover, according to the study, the average student in a magnet school was more likely to have higher achievement in reading and social studies than a comparable student in a non-magnet school.

Another study, based in San Antonio (a school district where 80% of the children qualify for free or reduced price lunch), compared achievement score data of children enrolled in a magnet program with applicants to the program denied because of space restrictions, and with students who chose to stay in the public comprehensive schools. The analysts found that even after adjusting for past test scores, family background, and parental expectations, there were statistically significant differences in the test scores of children enrolled in the magnets and those not admitted.[43]

Other studies show that students in choice programs may not fare any better than those in a neighborhood school system. One study comparing choice schools and comprehensive public schools found that although the choice schools were more racially diverse, there was no difference in achievement levels.[44] In another study, a case study of the Milwaukee program which provides parents vouchers to send children to certain private schools, the author found that the students in the private schools did no better on tests than a group of randomly selected public school students.[45] Recently, however, both the procedure and the findings of the Milwaukee study have been criticized.[46] One recent study asserted that the students in the voucher program for three and four years scored higher on standardized tests than the students who had applied for the program but were not accepted due to space limitations.[47]

Thus, while there is some evidence that magnet school attendance brings benefits to minority and low-income students, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

B. Graduation Rates

Perhaps more than scores on standardized tests, high school graduation rates are an important indicator of whether minority and low-income children are receiving educational benefits from choice programs, In St. Louis, more than half the black students who entered magnet high schools in 1989 graduated in 1993. In stark contrast, the graduation rates for non-magnet students who entered high school in 1989 were in the mid 20s. (This rate may increase to more than 30% when students who graduate after five years or longer are factored in, but the rate in any event is distressingly low.)[48]

Black students who participate in the St. Louis interdistrict transfer programs also are far more likely to graduate than non-magnet students. In 8 of 15 suburban districts, the graduation rates were 50% or more, including a high of 65% in the Clayton district.[49] Interestingly, the graduation rates for transfer students were highly correlated with the college-going rates for the district as a whole. For example, the Pattonville district, which sent 85% of its graduates to college, graduated 60% of its transfer students in 1992. The Hancock Place district, where only 46% of its graduates went to college, graduated only 27% of its transfer students.[50] The data strongly suggest that the educational environment in the district as a whole, and in individual schools, strongly influences the performance of minority transfer students.

Chapter VI

What May Account for Improved Outcomes in Public Choice Programs?

As noted, magnets and other choice programs tend to draw students of somewhat higher socio-economic status than those who remain in neighborhood schools. Nevertheless, the evidence cited above indicates that many low-income students do choose such programs and that students of like socio-economic status tend to do better in choice schools than in other schools. While some part of the difference may be due to self-selection factors not measured by data used to gauge socio-economic status, it is likely that school factors also are at work.

A. Magnets

Magnet schools apparently are successful in attracting strong education leaders as principals. Significantly, almost a third of the parents in Cincinnati listed the principal of the magnet school as one of their reasons for choosing that school.[51]

Principals of magnet schools are often afforded more autonomy than their comprehensive school counterparts, especially in the area of recruiting and hiring teachers. Often this flexibility includes allowing principals to actively advertise for teachers.[52] In many districts, including the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), principals of magnets can interview anyone in the teacher pool and are allowed to disregard seniority for hiring purposes.[53] The autonomy afforded principals enables them to seek teachers with special experience and, perhaps more important, with a commitment to the goals of the magnet school.

Other differences in the characteristics of the teachers in magnet and non-magnet schools emerged from the Vanderbilt Study. In Cincinnati, magnet schools employ a higher percentage of minority teachers than the non-magnet schools. In St. Louis and Cincinnati, magnet schools have attracted more teachers with masters and other advanced degrees than the non-magnet schools. Answers to the survey indicate that in both cities, magnet school teachers are also more likely to choose the magnet school because of the theme or philosophy of the particular school or the instructional program offered to the students. Non-magnet school teachers are most likely to choose their school based on a desire to work with the school's teachers.[54] Data from Nashville do not reflect the differences in teacher characteristics between magnets and non-magnets that were noted in Cincinnati and St. Louis.

In addition to differences in the way teachers are recruited and their characteristics, working conditions appear to differ in magnets and non-magnets. Principals and teachers in magnets have more autonomy in the curriculum and operation of the school. In fact, they "are not only allowed but expected to offer different content or teach in a different way from traditional schools."[55] The Vanderbilt Study found that in both St. Louis and Cincinnati, magnet teachers feel as though they have more flexibility in their curricula and teaching style than their non-magnet counterparts.[56] Magnet teachers in both systems are more likely to have taught in teams than teachers in other types of schools. In Nashville, non-magnet and school-within-school teachers are more likely to agree with the statement that their curriculum relies on textbooks and short answers.

Other potential reasons for the improved outcomes in magnet schools are greater parental involvement and greater resources. Although overall parental involvement in all three cities studied is low, the involvement is greater in the magnet schools.[57] In all three communities, magnet school parents are more likely to report a supportive school climate than non-magnet parents. In Cincinnati and Nashville, magnet school parents are also more likely to report more frequent communications from the school. In St. Louis, although magnet school parents receive more communications from the school across all sources (the child, school personnel, newspapers), non-magnet parents report more communications from the child's teacher. In Nashville, magnet school parents are also more likely to feel that they have influence over school policies.

Beyond these matters, magnets command more resources and higher budgets than non-magnets, which may also account for improved student outcomes. As noted above, St. Louis spends significantly more per pupil on its magnet schools than on non-magnets. But information on expenditure patterns in schools districts with magnet schools is far from complete. And one recent study of matched choice and non-choice schools found that "data did not support a hypotheses that public choice schools were more resource rich" or that curriculum was different in choice and non-choice schools.[58]

B. The St. Louis Interdistrict Program

The St. Louis interdistrict transfer program has met with a significant degree of success, both in the tenth-grade scores of transfer students on standardized achievements tests and in their graduation rates. These positive outcomes are consistent with an extensive body of research which shows that low-income students achieve better educational results in classrooms where the large majority of students are economically advantaged than in classrooms where the large majority are poor.[59]

Most schools in St. Louis County are middle class and marked by high expectations set by parents, teachers, and students themselves. Academic success and advancement to college are expected or demanded. Where schools fall short, parents demand (and have the clout) to bring about change.

Schools also provide less advantaged students with the access to the practical know-how, contacts, and counseling they can use to enter middle-class society. By contrast, many inner-city schools "cope with homelessness, severe health and nutrition problems, an atmosphere of gangs and violence threatening students, and few jobs for high school graduates."[60]

Many of the same observations about the advantages of the educational environment in suburban schools also can be made about magnets, although magnet schools in Cincinnati and St. Louis are less dominantly middle class than the suburban schools that transfer students attend in St. Louis.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

In the Commission's view, the most critical education needs in the nation are those of poor minority children in inner cities. The central problem is isolation—racial and socio-economic. Over the last three decades, some changes have occurred, but the basic problem has remained.

In the 1950s and 1960s, race was the dominant factor, and discriminatory housing and education policies confined black children, poor and non-poor, to segregated schools. Thirty years later, some degree of racial desegregation has occurred in many communities; indeed, many city school systems have lost both black and white populations to suburbs and private schools. But the black and Hispanic American children who remain in the cities are often the poorest of the poor. Where once black and white poverty was dispersed largely in rural areas, great numbers of the minority poor are now concentrated in central-city schools.

The conditions that exist in these schools are often the antithesis of friendly learning environments. Many children come to school hungry and with a variety of medical problems. They often lack strong family support at home; indeed, some struggle to exist in families troubled by drugs and domestic abuse. Teachers who face the daunting task of educating children with special needs often receive little support from school authorities, families, and the community. Those who try often become demoralized after a period of time and find more remunerative and less frustrating employment in advantaged schools elsewhere.

While there is no single answer to these problems, it is clear that many children would benefit from attending schools in environments where poverty is not so concentrated. Study after study has shown that poor children are more likely to thrive in middle-class schools. Such schools usually set high standards for all children, provide peer influences that help lift the aspirations of those least well off, enable teachers to give more individual attention to children with special needs and furnish a curriculum and resources that encourage student success.

If public policy were made solely on the basis of the most reliable educational research, students in metropolitan areas would be assigned to schools in such a way as to avoid concentrations of poverty. Alternatively, poor children who remained in poor schools would be assigned to the most qualified teachers who would be supported by adequate resources, health, and social services.

But the politics of public education make it an uphill struggle to secure educational policies that will benefit large numbers of minority and poor children. Instead, progress seems to come only through piecemeal initiatives that benefit some but not all children with educational needs. Public school choice policies—particularly magnet schools—are one such initiative.

Considered only as a desegregation tool, proponents believe that magnets have provided more stability than mandatory reassignments, deterring white flight with the promise of better educational opportunities. Opponents say the evidence is inconclusive and point to well-publicized exceptions, such as Prince George's County, Maryland, where rapidly changing demographics overwhelmed desegregation efforts even with the use of magnets. They also note

that in these situations, the effort to maintain racial balance may result in the denial of magnet opportunities to minority children even when there are vacant seats. The debate about magnets versus mandatory reassignments, however, is largely moot since over the last decade very few courts have employed mandatory reassignments except as a backup remedy to choice in school desegregation cases.

Considered as a means to extend educational opportunity to children who have been denied it in the past, the evidence of this report is that magnets and other types of public school choice have both plusses and minuses. On the positive side, magnets and the St. Louis interdistrict transfer program have enabled many economically disadvantaged children to escape failing schools in high-poverty areas and to receive more effective schooling. Magnets have also allowed some fresh breezes to blow through stagnant city systems, enabling talented principals and teachers to imbue schools with new energy and a new mission. The result has been an increase in the numbers of city schools that are succeeding.

On the negative side, while magnets draw disadvantaged students, they usually come from families that are the most informed and motivated. When these students transfer, the students left behind are arguably even more bereft of opportunity than before. Moreover, in some situations magnets appear to command higher budgets and stronger teachers than non-magnets, adding to the inequity.

In the end, however, the magnet schools and St. Louis interdistrict transfer program examined in this study do meet the "compared to what" test posed at the beginning of this report. In other words, absent these initiatives, it is very unlikely that minority and poor children would have received comparable educational opportunities—opportunities that have enabled many to succeed academically and to go on to college or productive employment. Accordingly, in the findings and recommendations that follow, the Commission proposes the continued use of public school choice initiatives with two important conditions.

The first is that the programs operate under safeguards designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged children are effectively informed of the opportunities and that every effort to minimize socio-economic isolation and other types of inequity be made.

This point cannot be emphasized too strongly. It has become fashionable for advocates of vouchers and choice to assert that their aim is to give poor children the same options that everyone else already has. The evidence of this report strongly suggests that without thoughtful and carefully implemented outreach to poor families, this stated goal of choice programs may remain a paper promise.

The second condition is that government at every level give priority to the needs of children who continue to attend schools in racial and socio-economic isolation. While the Commission regards such isolation as unhealthy for all children, white and minority, rich and poor, and for American society as a whole, it does not appear that these conditions will change in a dramatic way at any time in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, the minimum that a caring society can do is to apply the knowledge that has been gained about effective education in disadvantaged environments and—through preschool programs, reading programs in the early grades, upgrading the skills of teachers, and other initiatives detailed in Recommendation II—increase significantly the number of successful schools.

If we can muster the national will to make concerted efforts along these several fronts, the Commission believes that as the nation enters the 21st century, it can hope to realize the objectives for public education that Thomas Jefferson articulated in the early days of the Republic:

> *to bring into action that mass of talents which lie buried in poverty in every county for want of means of development, and thus give activity to a mass of mind, which in proportion to our population, shall be the double or treble of what it is in most counties.*[61]

Chapter VIII

Findings and Recommendations

A. Findings

1. Magnet schools in the cities studied—Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Nashville—have been an effective device for bringing about racial desegregation of public schools. This reflects experience elsewhere, except in districts such as Prince Georges County, Maryland,where changing demographics have overwhelmed the ability to desegregate through magnets or other techniques.
2. Magnet schools have had some limited success in breaking down socio-economic isolation in public schools. While magnets have resulted in the enrollment of some poor children in schools with children of higher socio-economic status, the large number of children remaining in non-magnet schools in the cities studied have been predominantly poor. Thus, magnets have contributed to a new phenomenon—schools that have achieved a measure of desegregation by race but remain largely segregated on the basis of income.
3. Another form of public school choice, the inter-district transfer program in St. Louis under which black children from the city attend public schools in predominantly white suburban districts, has had greater success in breaking down socio-economic isolation in the public schools. This is because the black children participating in the transfer program are predominantly poor, while the children in the receiving schools are predominantly middle class.
4. The differences in the socio-economic status of children who are participating and those who are not participating in magnet programs have occurred despite efforts to encourage the enrollment of poor children in the programs. These efforts have included the selection of sites for magnets in areas accessible to lower income minority families; a determination to impose testing or other requirements for entry into magnets only in rare cases (for example, high school performing arts or gifted and talented programs); the establishment of recruitment and counseling services designed to disseminate information about magnets widely in the community; and the use (in at least one community) of a lottery as a means of distributing limited numbers of magnet seats.
5. The reason for the socio-economic contrast between magnet and non-magnet schools is not that low-income parents fail to use the sources of information provided by school districts, since many parents do receive newsletters and other communications setting forth the choices. Rather, middle class parents tend to choose magnets at a higher rate because they have a broader pool of resources and social networks to tap into in making school decisions. In addition, higher income parents tend to choose schools based on academic reputation while lower income parents are often influenced more by the availability of special help or by convenience.
6. The data gathered in connection with the Commission's report indicate that students in magnet schools perform better than children in non-magnet schools. Additional evidence in two of the cities suggests that this may be the case even when differences in the socio-economic status of students are taken into account. Put another way,

low-income students in magnet schools generally do better on measures of academic performance than their counterparts in non-magnet schools. Some studies of other school districts confirm this, while others do not.

7. The available evidence in St. Louis also suggests that low-income students who participate in the magnet program and the interdistrict transfer program are significantly more likely to complete high school than their counterparts in non-magnet schools. The graduation rates of African American transfer students are highly correlated with the overall graduation rates in the suburban districts to which they transfer.
8. Among the factors that may account for the greater success of minority and poor students in magnet schools are the following:
   (a) Magnets often are successful in attracting strong educational leaders as principals.
   (b) Principals in magnet schools often are afforded autonomy in the selection of new and current teachers.
   (c) Principals and teachers in magnets often have more autonomy than their counterparts in non-magnet schools in shaping curriculum and operating the schools.
   (d) Levels of parental involvement are sometimes greater at magnet than at non-magnet schools.
   (e) Magnets often have greater resources at their disposal than non-magnets.
9. Among the factors that may account for the success of the interdistrict transfer program in St. Louis are the following:
   (a) Most schools to which students transfer in the St. Louis suburbs are predominantly middle class and are marked by high expectations for academic achievement and advancement to college—expectations set by parents, teachers, and students themselves.
   (b) Where schools fall short, parents have the influence to bring about educational improvements.
   (c) Most schools in the program provide to less advantaged children practical information, counseling, and contacts that give them access to educational and employment opportunities that children in more isolated circumstances do not have.
10. Taken as a whole, despite the drawbacks noted, the magnet schools in the communities studied (as well as the interdistrict transfer program in St. Louis) have produced gains for minority and lower income students that would not have been available to them if the programs had not been initiated.

B. Recommendations

Because magnet schools and interdistrict transfer programs have made a positive contribution to improving educational opportunity for poor and minority students in public schools, the Commission recommends their continued use as *one* means of affording equal educational opportunity. But if these methods of public school choice are to achieve their intended purpose, they should operate under guidelines that ensure that they will not contribute to socio-economic isolation or other inequities.

I. Accordingly, the Commission recommends that the following guidelines be observed by school systems establishing magnet schools, by government agencies that administer financial assistance to magnet schools, and by courts considering magnets as part of a remedy:

A. Socio-economic isolation in the distribution of students between magnet and non-magnet schools should be avoided by

- requiring that all parents make choices among the alternatives available rather than assigning non-choosing parents to neighborhood schools.
- establishing recruitment and counseling centers that disseminate information in places where parents live and do business—in grocery stores, community health centers, doctors' offices, gas stations, laundromats, and public housing offices—as well as through newsletters, posters, and radio announcements. Centers should also be located near public transportation, have evening hours, and employ community residents

who are able to share experiences and perspectives with school parents.

- locating magnets in areas accessible to low-income families and providing free transportation to all schools.
- avoiding the imposition of tests or other screening requirements except in those rare situations where meeting the requirements is essential to successful participation in the magnet.
- allocating magnet seats through a lottery where demand exceeds supply.

Where application of the above criteria fails to alleviate socio-economic isolation, decision-making authorities should consider the establishment of acceptable ranges for socio-economic desegregation similar to the acceptable ranges for racial desegregation that are traditionally established at magnet schools. The ranges would ensure that the proportion of students eligible for free and reduced priced lunch at any one school roughly reflects the proportion eligible in the school system as a whole.

Commentary: Several of the guidelines listed above are employed in Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Nashville and have not successfully avoided socio-economic isolation. But none of the districts employs the full menu of suggestions. None requires that parents make a choice although this is widely used in controlled choice programs and appears to have a good effect. Nor has any district used a recruitment and counseling center to make the concerted effort at interpersonal communication suggested above. At least one community—La Crosse, Wisconsin—has used socio-economic guidelines to avoid concentrating poor children in a few elementary schools.

B. Socio-economic isolation within schools should be avoided with:

- policies favoring the establishment of schoolwide or dedicated magnets rather than magnet programs within non-magnet schools.
- policies that require corrective action whenever the grouping of students within schools results in the concentration of low-income students in particular classrooms.

Commentary: Some school districts establish magnet programs within "regular" or "neighborhood schools" and report that the schools are racially desegregated notwithstanding the fact that the magnet program may be largely white in student composition and the non-magnet program largely minority. Similar disparities within such schools also occur on the basis of socio-economic status. While it is possible to require a certain amount of contact during the school day between magnet and non-magnet students, the benefits of racial and socio-economic desegregation are largely lost when students participate in separate academic programs. Similarly, the intended benefits of choice may be lost when families exercise options, only to find their children tracked into classrooms designed for low achievers.

C. Inequities between magnet and non-magnet schools should be avoided by rigorous scrutiny of individual school budgets and other information to ensure that teacher qualifications and school resources are distributed as fairly as possible.

Commentary: Although magnets sometimes need particular equipment or materials that are costly, the disparities in magnet and non-magnet budgets often cannot be fully explained by these needs. Careful scrutiny can avoid giving magnets an unjustified edge. If the budgets of non-magnets with large numbers of poor children are increased to meet the needs discussed in Recommendation III, the disparities will likely be eliminated.

II. The Commission also recommends that federal and state agencies consider and implement strategies for making the benefits of interdistrict voluntary transfer programs of the kind implemented in St. Louis available to larger numbers of students. Such programs should contain safeguards designed to ensure that schools will be racially desegregated and will afford students from low-income families opportunities to attend schools that are not socio-economically isolated.

Commentary: In many respects the success of the St. Louis voluntary interdistrict program in improving educational outcomes is more easily replicated than magnet schools. In the transfer program, African American youngsters, most of them poor, are being accepted (and in the best cases, welcomed) into an ongoing successful educational enterprise, whereas the creators of a magnet school in most instances are building from the ground up, establishing an institution that provides effective education where none existed before.

Efforts to extend the benefits of magnets to many more schools in a system are not likely to succeed absent initiatives to develop in principals and teachers the kinds of leadership qualities that have made magnets effective.

Some states have moved in the direction of providing the kind of choice recommended by the Commission by adopting statutes encouraging public school choice. Congress, in extending Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, called upon states to adopt as one remedy for failing schools a right of students to transfer to other schools in the district or in nearby districts. But these measures will fail to provide equal educational opportunity unless low-income children are given priority and furnished with free transportation and sufficient information to make these choices. Too often these crucial elements are lacking.

Choice programs will not meet their stated purposes if they serve only families that already have the resources to exercise choice, for example, by purchasing housing near public schools with superior resources or by enrolling their children in private schools.

III. Recognizing that whatever desegregation and choice strategies are adopted, large numbers of minority and poor students are likely to continue to attend school in racial and socio-economic isolation, the Commission recommends that major efforts be undertaken at the federal, state, and local levels to improve educational opportunity in these schools. Such efforts should include extending Head Start and other preschool development programs to far more children than are served now, making wider use of early grade reading programs that have been successful in ensuring that students are not delayed in acquiring reading skills, lowering class sizes in the early grades, providing counselors and other trained personnel to help deal with the array of health and social service problems that many poor children face, and initiating parent literacy and parent involvement programs to help parents participate effectively in the education of their children.

Commentary: While the odds are stacked against children in schools with large concentrations of poverty, almost every city school district can boast of one or more schools where larger numbers of children are doing well. Generally, these schools have most if not all of the elements of an effective educational program that are listed above, along with strong educational leadership. While initiating these measures requires additional resources, in almost all cases they can be accomplished well within the boundaries of educational expenditures per child that are made in affluent suburban districts.

In any event, considerations of equity, fairness, and equal opportunity under law demand that new choice programs be accompanied by efforts to level the playing field for those left behind.

* * *

In the end, the revitalization of public education will depend not simply on school authorities but on the actions of government at all levels and the leadership exerted by private institutions and citizens. Just as government policies created huge public housing complexes that isolated the poor and minorities in neighborhoods and schools, so must government policy today afford housing choice and opportunity to poor people, a policy that will increase educational opportunity. So too, business leaders should look to the public schools as their primary source of productive employees, providing the support needed for schools to reach high standards and holding them accountable for meeting them. Most important, people in communities throughout the nation should look beyond the educational needs of

their own children to the needs of the larger society for capable employees and responsible citizens and offer the support that public schools require to prepare students for these roles.

If this sense of mission can be developed, the Commission believes that the policies advocated here will make an important contribution to the educational advancement of poor and minority students.

Endnotes

[1] See, *e.g.*, David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (1995); Gerald Bracy, "Why Can't They Be Like We Were?", *Phi Delta Kappan*, Oct. 1991, at 104.

[2] See Amy Stuart Wells, Cynthia Grutzik, and Sibyll Carnochan, *Underlying Policy Assumptions of Charter Reform*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (1996) (cited with author's permission).

[3] Ellen Goldring and Claire Smrekar, *Parental Choice: Consequences for Families, Students, and Schools: Technical Summary Report: Cincinnati and St. Louis* (June 1995) (hereinafter Cincinnati/St. Louis Report); *Parental Choice: Consequences for Families, Students, and Schools: Technical Summary Report: Nashville* (October 1995) (hereinafter Nashville Report).

[4] As one report on education put it, "Americans have typically thought of education as a healer of great social divisions. When the need arose to make one nation out of many communities of foreign origin, the people turned to the public schools and their faith was justified." *Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association at the American Association of School Administrators*, American Education and the Search for Equal Opportunity, at 4 (1965).

[5] Francis X. Clines, "House Votes for Vouchers for Students in the Capital," *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1995, at A22.

[6] The Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from a lower court that allowed a magnet school program as part of a desegregation plan. *Morgan v. Kerrigan*, 421 US 963 (1975).

[7] Rolf K. Blank et al., "After 15 Years; Magnet Schools in Urban Education," in *Who Chooses? Who Loses?*, at 154, 157 (Bruce Fuller and Richard F. Elmore, eds., 1996).

[8] Id. at 158.

[9] Id. at 159.

[10] Id. at 158.

[11] Id. at 154.

[12] Amy Stuart Wells et al., *A Comparison of Magnet and Charter Schools: The Trade-off Between Desegregation and Deregulation* (soon to be published—on file with the author).

[13] Id. at 5.

[14] See, *e.g.*, Lauri Steel and Roger Levine, *Educational Innovation in Multiracial Contexts: The Growth of Magnet Schools in American Education*, 61-68 (U.S. Department of Education, 1994); Lauri Steel and Marian Eaton, *Reducing, Eliminating, and Preventing Minority Isolation in American Schools: The Impact of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program* (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

[15] Joan Little and Cynthia Todd, "Discrimination in City Schools Lives On But Basis Is Magnet Schools, Not Race", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Feb. 20, 1994, at 1A.

[16] *Bronson v. Board of Education*, 578 F.Supp. 1091, 1100 (1984).

[17] Cincinnati/St. Louis Report.

[18] William L. Taylor, *Magnet Schools and the Minority Poor: Effective Remedy or Pyrrhic Victory?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, at 6-7 (April 11, 1996).

[19] See, *e.g*, Board of Education of the City of St. Louis, Desegregation Report and Policy Statement, August 1995 [City Board Exhibit No. 1, *Liddell v. Board of Education*, E.D.Mo.No. 72-100 (c)(6), filed March 1996].

[20] See report of Dr. Leonard B. Stevens regarding the St. Louis Public Schools, November 1995 [Department of Justice Exhibit No. 90, *Liddell v. Board of Education*, E.D.Mo.No. 72-100 (c)(6), filed March 1996.]

[21] Settlement for *Liddell v. Board of Education*, IX-7-IX-8; see also *Hot Buttons: Unraveling 10 Controversial Issues in Education* (Donovan R. Walling, ed., 1997).

[22] Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council for the Settlement Agreement, Tenth Report to the United States District Court Eastern District of Missouri, September 1993, at 4-6. For more information contact: Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council, St. Louis, MO.

[23] Id. at 6-14.

[24] See *Kelley v. Board of Education*, 572 F. Supp. 317 (M.D.Tenn. 1983).

[25] For more information contact: Tracy Libros, Metropolitan Nashville Public School system.

[26] This apparently has not been the case, however, in other communities, according to a recent federal study which found that many schools that receive federal assistance for magnets are not in fact desegregated. See Steel and Eaton, *supra* note 14.

[27] A report from the Civic Progress Task Force on Desegregation of the St. Louis Public School System, Part I, December 1995 [Department of Justice Exhibit No. 90, *Liddell v. Board of Education*, E.D.Mo. No. 72-100 (c)(6), filed March 1996] ["Civic Progress Report"]. The task force, chaired by Dr. William Danforth, the former chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis, found that the enrollment of black students in different types of St. Louis public schools in 1995 was

- magnet schools: 15.0% (6,646)
- interdistrict transfer program: 28.5% (12,593)
- integrated neighborhood schools: 15.9% (7,009)
- non-integrated neighborhood schools: 40.6% (17,915)
- total: 100% (44,163)

[28] Cincinnati/St. Louis Report at Appendix A and Appendix B.

[29] The link between social class and such networks has been identified in many studies.

[30] Claire Smrekar, *Magnet Schools and the Context of School Choice: Implications for Public Policy*. Paper given at the Annual Convention of the University Council for Educational Administration, at 7 (Oct. 27-29, 1995).

[31] Id. at 6.

[32] Id. at 10.

[33] Id. at 8.

[34] Cincinnati/St. Louis Report.

[35] For both Cincinnati and St. Louis, the income levels were defined by annual incomes as follows:

- Low: less than $15,000
- Medium: from $15,000 through $25,000
- Medium-high: from $25,000 through $50,000
- High: greater than $50,000.

See Cincinnati/St. Louis Report at Appendix A and Appendix B.

[36] Testimony of David Armor, Transcript, Vol. 2, 2-118 to 2-123, *Liddell v. Board of Education*, E.D.Mo. No. 72-100 (c)(6), March 6, 1996.

[37] The data come from the administration of the 1994 California Achievement Test (CAT), a norm-referenced test. The scores are the percentage of students in each school that scored at or above the national norm.

[38] The National Education Longitudinal Study referenced in the text was a nationwide survey sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics and other government agencies of 26,000 randomly selected eighth graders. Follow-up surveys were conducted in 1990 and 1992, when most of the students were in tenth grade and twelfth grade. The survey focused on various factors in a student's academic achievement including family, community, and school. For more information, see, *e.g.*, Anne Hafner et al., *A Profile of the American*

Eighth Grader: NELS:88 Student Descriptive Summary (National Center for Education Statistics and the Department of Education, June 1990) and subsequent reports.

[39] Stephen Plank et al., "Effects of Choice in Education," in *School Choice: Examining the Evidence,* at 111, 130-131(Edith Rasell and Richard Rothstein, eds., 1993).

[40] Id. at 116-117.

[41] Adam Gamoran, "Student Achievement in Public Magnet, Public Comprehensive, and Private City High Schools," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* Spring 1996, at 1, 14.

[42] Id. at 8.

[43] Valerie Martinez et al., "Public School Choice in San Antonio," in *Who Chooses? Who Loses?,* at 50, 63 (Bruce Fuller and Richard R. Elmore, eds., 1996).

[44] Mary Erin Driscoll, "Choice, Achievement and School Community," in *School Choice: Examining the Evidence,* at 147, 155 (Edith Rasell and Richard Rothstein, eds., 1993).

[45] John F. Witte, "Who Benefits from the Milwaukee Choice Program?", in *Who Chooses? Who Loses?,* at 118, 135 (Bruce Fuller and Richard R. Elmore, eds., 1996).

[46] Jay P. Greene and Paul E. Peterson, *The Effectiveness of School Choice in Milwaukee: A Secondary Analysis of Data from the Program's Evaluation.* Paper presented before the Panel on the Political Analysis of Urban School Systems, during the August-September meetings of the American Political Science Association (Aug. 30, 1996).

[47] "Study Shows Voucher Pupils Thriving in Private Schools," *New York Times,* Aug. 13, 1996 at A8.

[48] Taylor, *supra* note 18, at 10-12; Testimony of William Trent, Vol. 10-A, at 10A-91 to 10A-92 (March 19, 1996). See also, Civic Progress Report, *supra.*

[49] Taylor, *supra* note 18, at 10-12; Trent, *supra* note 48, at 10A-92–10A-94.

[50] Table 3, Civic Progress Report, *supra,* note 48.

[51] Cincinnati/St. Louis Report; Nashville Report.

[52] Steel and Levine, *supra* note 14, at 57.

[53] Id. at 57. Amy Stuart Wells et al., *supra* note 12, at 17 .

[54] Cincinnati/St. Louis Report.

[55] Mary Haywood Metz, "Magnet Schools and the Reform of Public Schooling," in *Choice in Education: Potential and Problems,* at 123, 126 (William Lowe Boyd and Herbert J. Walberg, eds., 1990).

[56] Cincinnati/St. Louis Report.

[57] Nashville Report.

[58] Driscoll, *supra* note 44, at 153 -155.

[59] See, *e.g.,* U.S. Department of Education, *National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program: The Interim Report* (June 1992); Robert L. Crain and Jack Strauss, *School Desegregation and Black Occupational Attainments: Results from a Long-term Experiment* (Center for Social Organization of Schools, 1985); James S. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Government Printing Office, 1966) (also known as the Coleman Report).

[60] Gary Orfield and Sean F. Reardon, "Race, Poverty and Inequality," in *New Opportunities: Civil Rights at a Crossroads* 17, 20 (Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, 1992).

[61] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools,* at 1 (1967) citing letter from Thomas Jefferson to Mr. Correa, November 25, 1817, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* at 94-95 (Washington, ed., 1854).

Part Two:

Technical Summary Reports

Parental Choice: Consequences for Families, Students, and Schools

Technical Summary Report: Cincinnati and St. Louis

Ellen Goldring and Claire Smrekar
Vanderbilt University—June 1995

The claims made regarding the effects of parental choice on school improvement are both ambitious and controversial. Proponents of public school choice maintain it promotes racial balance voluntarily rather than by court-ordered busing of children to distant schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods. They maintain it promotes academic excellence by making individual schools more focused on quality to attract students. Finally, choice is seen as a way to counteract income effects on educational opportunity, where wealthier families are able to buy or rent homes in neighborhoods with desirable schools.

In particular, magnet schools, the focus of this study, are being introduced in more and more school systems in an attempt to improve scholastic standards, to promote diversity in race and income, and to provide a range of programs to satisfy individual talents and interests.

However, empirical evidence on the effects of public school choice remains relatively scant. Virtually all this research relies on secondary analyses of data sets with critically important data missing, case studies of particular schools that cannot speak to school-systemwide effects, comparisons of public and private schools, or official reports that deal with only some of the philosophical and design issues that are important to the development of policy and practice across school systems.

As the debate over the use of choice to improve schools intensifies and the need to rely on magnet schools to achieve desegregation increases, two significant demographic trends complicate matters further. First, the nation's schools are becoming increasingly diverse, racially and ethnically. Second, the proportion of the nation's children who live in poverty is increasing. These two developments make it more important to estimate the consequences of parental choice on school enrollment patterns. These trends highlight the urgent need to ensure that increasing parental choice does not further disadvantage children who need high-quality education the most.

This project looks at the systemic use of magnet schools as examples of choice within and across public school districts. We are aware, of course, that the lessons of publicly regulated and managed parental choice plans cannot be generalized to choice plans that include private schools. Our analysis, however, sheds light on some of the assumptions underlying free market approaches to choice because we have collected information on what kinds of parents choose magnet schools and the reasons they do so, as well as information on the characteristics of parents whose children are assigned to neighborhood or zoned schools, without choice.

We have investigated the consequences of public school choice plans in communities where the plans have been carefully developed and monitored and where education is relatively well-funded. We believe the acid test of choice proposals is whether they serve the educational needs and interests of poor and minority children. Wealthier families have more latitude to buy or rent homes in the neighborhood or zone of a particularly desirable school. Accordingly, choice proposals should be evaluated in terms of their effects on those least able to exercise this kind of choice—those parents whose hous-

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ing choices are severely constrained by income or persistent discrimination.

This study examines various dynamics and outcomes of efforts to increase parental choice among public schools. The major questions addressed are:

1. What is the context of decision-making for parents in a system of school choice?
   (a) Who chooses magnet schools? Does the enrollment of children in alternative choice schools typically sort students along socioeconomic lines and/or by race and ethnicity?
   (b) How are choices made? What sources of information do parents use when making choices?
   (c) Why do parents make the choices they do? What are parents' reasons for choosing a particular school?
2. What is the impact of district choice programs on the access to communal opportunities for learning for all children, and particularly low-income and minority children? Does the interaction between parents and schools differ across social class, race, and ethnicity in magnet and non-magnet schools, and is this interaction influenced by the social class, race, and ethnicity of parents and schools?
3. Are there differences between magnet and non-magnet school conditions?

Study Overview and Methodology

The present study was conducted in the 1993-94 academic year in three cities with established magnet school programs: Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Nashville. This paper presents the results from the Cincinnati and St. Louis segments of the study. Nashville's magnet system was undergoing fundamental changes during the year the study was conducted and for that reason its results are analyzed in a separate section.

District Overviews

Cincinnati

During the 1993-94 school year, the Cincinnati Public School District operated 61 elementary schools, 8 junior high/middle schools, 10 secondary schools, and 7 special schools. Magnet (or what the Cincinnati system calls alternative) program choices were offered to students at all grade levels (K–12). The system operated a total of 51 alternative programs in 1993-94, including 26 separate program themes at 44 different school sites. (Note: Several sites operated with more than one program theme.)

In the Cincinnati system, magnet programs are differentiated by curriculum or special interest areas, as well as by instructional approach (for example, Montessori, Paideia). Magnets in the alternative program are also differentiated by enrollment structure and program coverage. The Cincinnati system uses four types of structures. (1) Full, or dedicated, magnets enroll students strictly on the basis of a formal application and admissions process (described below) and provide alternative instruction to all students enrolled at the school site. (2) Mixed magnets provide alternative instruction to all students enrolled at the school, but enroll a combination of neighborhood/zoned students (because a percentage of the enrollment is reserved for zoned students) and those who have formally applied to the school but live outside the school's attendance zone (city-wide application zone). (3) Schools-within-schools are programmatically distinct components of a neighborhood school and provide alternative instruction only to those students who are enrolled in the magnet component based on their selection through the district's alternative school application process. (4) Mixed schools-within-schools are special versions of schools-within-schools. They are organized within an existing neighborhood school, and reserve a percentage of their enrollment capacity for zoned children, in addition to children living outside the attendance area.

Acceptance into magnet programs is based

primarily on the application date (first-come, first-served) and race. Transportation is provided for students in grades K–8 who live more than one mile from their alternative school. Transportation is provided for all students in grades 9–12.

The system enrolled 46% of its students in magnet programs in the 1993-94 school year. Of those enrolled in magnets, 61.7% were African American. More than 43% of the district's African American students were enrolled in magnet programs in 1993-94. Total district enrollment in 1993-94 was approximately 51,000 (66% African American, 32% white, 2% other).

St. Louis

The St. Louis system involves interdistrict choice. In this case, parents can choose between schools inside the district and some schools outside the district in order to promote racial balance.

Under the provisions of a 1983 Federal court order, the St. Louis City Public School District operates an interdistrict voluntary transfer program, which includes magnet schools in the city. The consent decree, which ended desegregation suits, involves heavy use of busing, with some children spending as much as an hour on the bus morning and evening.

During the 1993-94 school year, 13,934 students were enrolled in the transfer program between the city and the suburban school districts. Of these, 12,775 black city students transferred to suburban county schools (the schools these students attended are schools of choice but not magnet schools), while 1,159 county students transferred to the city to attend magnets. Transportation is provided for all city and county students enrolled in the transfer program. County-to-city transfers were at an all-time high in the 1993-94 school year, up 16% from the preceding year, according to a March 1994 report from the Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council. This agency oversees the settlement agreement that ended the desegregation suit.

The St. Louis City District has 26 full-time and 2 part-time magnet programs ("schools of choice") within the city. Any student who lives in St. Louis City and white students who live in the 16 participating suburban county districts may apply. Assignments to magnets are made on the basis of a general lottery, held in the spring. In 1993-94, the district enrolled 10,087 students in city magnets: 5,890 blacks (58% of total magnet enrollment) and 4,197 whites (42% of total magnet enrollment). Total enrollment in St. Louis City Schools is approximately 36,091 of whom 78% are black. Approximately 15% of the city's black students are enrolled in city magnets, while 40% of the city's white students attend city magnets. In the suburban districts included in this study, the school populations are about 25% black.

The St. Louis City District operates a total of 104 schools, including 73 elementary schools, 21 middle schools, 10 high schools, and 7 special schools. The district operates both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools. The non-integrated non-magnet schools are 98% African-American.

The 16 suburban districts include approximately 109 elementary schools, 28 middle/junior high schools, and 26 high schools.

Methodology

Sample Frame Construction

During the summer of 1993, the central administrative office in each of the participating school districts provided a directory of all public elementary schools in the district for the 1992-93 school year. Schools were chosen for the sample based on the following criteria:

1. The participating school included a fourth and a fifth grade.
2. The fourth grade was not the entry grade.

These criteria were chosen to make it likely that each school would have a relatively substantial population of fifth-grade students who had been enrolled in the school for more than one year prior to the fall of 1993 (or the 1993-94 school year) and whose parents or guardians would therefore be relatively familiar with the school.

To reduce possible response bias, the initial sample frame was further screened, based on information provided by the central office, and schools were eliminated based on the following additional criteria:

1. Fourth- and fifth-grade classes assigned to the school were not actually attending that school in the 1992-93 or 1993-94 school year, for any reason, such as redistricting or renovation projects.
2. The school was a receiver of students reassigned for the same kinds of reasons, such as renovation or closure of their zoned school.
3. The school added or dropped a program within a two-year period prior to the 1993-94 school year, resulting in a substantial change in the composition of the student body.

Cincinnati Public Schools

Out of 54 schools in the sample frame (see Appendix A, Table A1), 20 were selected for inclusion in the final study sample—10 magnet schools and 10 non-magnet schools (see Appendix A, Table A2).

The final study sample of Cincinnati magnet schools was selected through a process of elimination by applying two exclusionary rules to the sample frame:

1. Magnets that were not full, or dedicated, were eliminated from the sample. (That is, schools-within-schools were excluded, as were magnets composed of a mixture of zoned and choice students.) As a result, 17 schools were eliminated.

2. Of the 15 magnets remaining, 5 were eliminated on the basis of information provided by the central office (during the late summer of 1993) that raised the possibility of significant response bias at these schools. Prior to the start of the 1993-94 school year, the district released the names of several schools, including 5 of the 15 full magnet schools in the sample frame, at which major programmatic changes were slated to occur during or after the 1993-94 school year. This announcement generated significant negative parental reaction to the proposed changes at these schools. Thus, these five schools were ruled out of the final sample, leaving ten magnets in the sample.

Also, after initially agreeing to participate, one of the ten remaining magnets in the sample dropped out of the study during the school year. Thus, the final magnet sample contained nine schools, including two Montessori magnets, two Paideia magnets, three schools with a foreign language theme, one "fundamental academy" (emphasizing traditional curricular themes and instructional approaches), and one school having a mathematics and science curricular emphasis.

Twenty-two non-magnet schools were included in the Cincinnati sample frame. Of these, ten were selected for the final study sample by pair-matching them with the ten selected magnet schools on the basis of the racial composition of the student body (using percent African American).

St. Louis City School District

In St. Louis, the initial sample frame included 66 schools. Five were excluded because fourth and fifth graders were not actually in attendance, and four were excluded because they received large numbers of reassigned students, leaving an adjusted sample frame of 57 schools. Of these, 26 were selected for inclusion in the study (Appendix B, Table B1).

The district operates three different types of schools under the terms of its desegregation plan:

- magnet schools,
- non-integrated non-magnet schools located in predominantly African American neighborhoods, and
- integrated non-magnet schools in or near "naturally integrated" or transitional neighborhoods or achieved by busing.

Schools were chosen for the final study sample from each category as follows (Appendix B, Table B2):

Magnet schools. All ten elementary magnet schools in St. Louis sample frame were selected.

Integrated schools. Ten of the 11 integrated schools in the sample frame were initially selected

by pair-matching them on racial balance (using total percent African American) with the 10 St. Louis magnet schools in the study sample.

The principal of one of the schools selected declined to participate, citing the excessive paperwork that would be involved with both this project and the school's selection for participation in a mandatory statewide assessment program that was about to begin. The one remaining integrated non-magnet school was then chosen to make up the sample.

However, after the first series of meetings with principals in early September 1993, two more schools had to be dropped from the sample. At one school, the fourth and fifth grades had been transferred out of the building because of a pending renovation project. The other school removed had changed its legal status from integrated non-magnet to non-integrated, effective with the 1993-94 school year. Therefore, eight integrated non-magnet schools remained in the final study sample.

Non-integrated schools. Eight of 36 non-integrated schools were randomly selected for inclusion in the study.

Suburban. The two of 16 suburban school districts with the highest number of interdistrict transfer students were selected for inclusion in the sample.

Procedures and Measures

Data Collection

An anonymous questionnaire was distributed to all fifth-grade parents and to all non-administrative certified staff in each school in the sample. Members of the research team visited each school and delivered questionnaires to a designated school contact person, who then distributed the parent questionnaires to the students through their fifth-grade homeroom teachers. Teacher questionnaires were distributed either in their school mailboxes or during a faculty meeting.

The students were instructed to have their parents return the questionnaires in sealed envelopes to the school for subsequent pickup by the designated school contact person. Students were told that if 85% of their class returned the questionnaires, they would each receive a food coupon from McDonald's fast-food restaurant. Teachers returned their questionnaires in sealed envelopes directly to their school contact person. Members of the research team returned periodically to collect the returned questionnaires.

Schools with a low response rate were targeted for follow-up that included a second round of visits and calls to the school. Attention was given in the follow-up procedures to ensure that the racial composition of the parents responding to the questionnaires was equivalent to the racial balance of the school.

The response rate in Cincinnati was 62.1% for the parent questionnaires and 67.6% for the teacher questionnaire (Appendix A, Table A3). The percentages of responses from African American and white parents from zone and magnet schools were equal. However, across both types of schools, these percentages amount to a response bias for white parents. That is, white parents are overrepresented in the sample.

The response rate in St. Louis was 67.4% for parents and 70.6% for teachers (Appendix B, Table B3). In St. Louis, African American and white parents responded at nearly identical rates, giving the study virtually no bias based on race. For the suburban school districts sampled, the response rate was 70.8% for parents and 55.5% for teachers.

Qualitative Multiple-case Studies

This report also includes data from qualitative case studies of four magnet schools (Paideia and math-science magnets in St. Louis, and two Basic Academy magnet schools in Cincinnati) which examine the context of school choice, the nature of school communities, and patterns of family-school interactions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, counselor, and teachers (including a cross-section from both lower and upper primary levels) at each of the four sites. A random, stratified sample (across race and social

class) of 12 families was selected to be interviewed from each school. Interviews with school staff were conducted at the school site; parents were interviewed in their homes. All interviews were audiotaped with participants' permission and transcribed. In addition to interviews, an array of school documents (including brochures, enrollment applications, letters, newsletters, handbooks, and meeting minutes) was collected and analyzed for content.

Interview transcripts and document analyses were coded and summarized according to general descriptive categories using the constant comparative method (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Converging pieces of information from interview transcripts were arranged according to broad themes and categories. Pattern coding (Fetterman, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 1989) was used to discern patterns of thought, action, and behavior among individuals and schools.

Results

Part 1: Context of Decision-making

Discussion of a system of choice in education requires an understanding of the context in which those decisions take place. A thorough understanding of the context further informs the various perspectives of both opponents and proponents of school choice plans.

Most research on parents' reasons for school choice has been limited to private schools (for example, Bauch, 1987; Bauch & Small, 1986; Erickson, 1982, 1984, 1986; Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Greeley, McCready, & McCourt, 1976; Kraushaar, 1972). Bauch and Small (1986) developed a typology listing four dimensions of parents' reasons for school choice: (1) academic and curricular reasons, (2) discipline, (3) religion and values, and (4) other considerations (for example, location of the school, transportation availability, child's choice).

Magnet schools, as a form of public school choice, allow parents to make decisions based on judgments about their children's education in a public school context (Metz, 1986). In a report on the Massachusetts controlled choice plan, Glenn (1993) suggests that parents provided a variety of reasons for selecting schools. In addition to concerns related to convenience and proximity to their homes, parents also cited attendance at a school by a sibling. These reasons, Glenn points out, were combined with educational quality issues, including school staff and climate.

This section addresses three questions relative to the context of public school choice for parents of fifth-grade students in Cincinnati and St. Louis, based on information obtained from our sample of parents and teachers: (A) Who is choosing magnet/alternative schools? (B) What sources of information are parents using to make their decisions? (C) Why are parents making the choices they make?

These questions were asked of parents of magnet school and zone school students in Cincinnati and of magnet, integrated non-magnet, and non-integrated school students in St. Louis. The suburban school choice in St. Louis is addressed in separate sections in each topic following the analysis of the St. Louis City Schools.

(A) Enrollment in Magnet and Non-magnet Schools

Debates regarding magnet school programs often focus on issues of self-selection and the so-called "creaming effect." That is, opponents of magnet schools claim that children who study in magnet schools are of higher social class and more motivated than those who do not choose magnet schools. Central to our research is the question of whether the enrollment of children in magnet schools sorts students along socio-economic lines and/or by race. In this section, we review this question and provide a portrait of the racial and socio-economic composition of magnet and non-magnet schools.

Racial Balance

There is little difference between the percentage of minority parents in magnet and integrated non-magnet schools, due to the apparently success-

ful implementation of enrollment guidelines contained in the St. Louis and Cincinnati districts' desegregation settlements. As noted above, 66% of the Cincinnati district's 1993-94 enrollment was African American and 78% of the St. Louis district's 1993-94 enrollment was African American. The Cincinnati district's magnet population was composed of 62% African American students, while African Americans constituted 70% of the district's non-magnet enrollment. The St. Louis district's magnet population in that year was 58% African American, while African-Americans constituted 61.3% of the district's integrated non-magnet enrollment. The exception to this desegregation model was the district's non-integrated schools, which were 98% African American.

Socio-economic Status

The following sections examine the socio-economic characteristics of families choosing magnet schools versus parents accepting mandatory assignment. Various indicators of socio-economic status examined in this study suggest that parents in magnet schools are of a significantly higher social class than their counterparts in non-magnet schools. This is the case across all racial groups in both cities.

Cincinnati

Income. Cincinnati's magnet school parents, across all racial groups, have significantly higher income levels than do parents in non-magnet schools (Appendix A, Table A4 and Appendix C, Figure C4). Thirty-four percent of magnet school parents have incomes above $50,000, compared with 18% of non-magnet school parents. Twenty-five percent of magnet school parents have general household income below $15,000, compared with 44% of non-magnet school parents. Information obtained from principals about their schools indicates that, on average, 49% of the students enrolled in magnet schools receive free or reduced price lunch, compared with 80% of the students in non-magnet schools.

Among minority parents in magnet schools, 34% have income levels below $15,000, compared with 54% of the minority parents in non-magnet schools. Twenty-nine percent of minority parents in magnet schools have incomes above $50,000, compared with 11% of minority parents in non-magnet schools. Similar trends are evident for white parents. Seventeen percent of white parents in magnet schools have incomes below $15,000, compared with 33.3% of white parents in non-magnet schools, while 35.5% of white parents in magnet schools have incomes above $50,000, compared with 22.7% in non-magnet schools.

Family Structure. Students from magnet schools are more likely to come from two-parent families. Sixty-three percent of the magnet school parents responding to this survey are married, compared with 44.5% of the non-magnet school parents. In addition, 9.7% of the magnet school parents who responded are single parents who never married, compared with 20.4% of the non-magnet school parents.

This trend of significant differences between magnet and non-magnet parents with respect to family structure holds across race as well (Appendix C, Figure C1). That is, for minorities as well as whites, there are more two-parent families in magnet schools than in non-magnet schools and more single-parent families in non-magnet schools than in magnet schools. Specifically, 50.3% of the respondent minority parents in magnet schools are married and 18.5% are single, while in non-magnet schools 32.9% of the minority parents are married and 32.8% are single. For white parents, 75% of those responding in magnet schools are married, compared with 56.8% married in non-magnet schools; 1.8% of the white respondents in magnet schools are single parents, while in non-magnet schools, 7.1% of the white parents responding are single. Magnet school parents also have significantly fewer children living in the same household than non-magnet parents.

Educational Level. Similar trends are evident in regard to the educational level of parents. Parents in magnet schools, across all racial groups, are more likely to have higher educational levels than their counterparts in non-magnet schools (Appendix C, Figure C2). For example, 27% of non-magnet school parents have not completed high school,

compared with 11% of the magnet school parents. In addition, 21.2% of the magnet school respondents are college graduates, compared with 11.9% of the non-magnet school respondents. Eighteen percent of the magnet school parents hold graduate degrees, compared with 7% of the non-magnet school parents.

This trend is similar for both minority and white parents. Twenty percent of magnet school minority parents who responded are college graduates, compared with 15.3% of non-magnet minority parents. In magnet schools 14.2% of the minority parents hold graduate degrees, compared with 1.6% in non-magnet schools. Among white parents in magnet schools, 22.6% are college graduates and 21.4% hold graduate degrees, while in non-magnet schools, 9.2% of the white parents are college graduates and 12.0% hold graduate degrees.

Employment Status. Parents in magnet schools are more likely to be employed than are parents in non-magnet schools (Appendix C, Figure C3). In magnet schools, 12.6% of the parents indicated that neither parent is employed (either full- or part-time), compared with 25.7% of non-magnet school parents. Among minority parents in magnet schools, 16.6% indicated that neither parent is employed, compared with 29.2% in non-magnet schools. Among white parents in magnet schools, 9.4% are unemployed; in contrast, 21.7% of the white parents in non-magnet schools are unemployed.

In summary, although the racial composition of magnet and non-magnet schools is similar, it is clear that magnet schools enroll students whose parents are of higher socio-economic status with regard to employment, educational level, family structure, and income. These differences are consistent for all racial groups.

St. Louis

Income. Magnet school parents, across all racial groups, have significantly higher income levels than parents in both integrated and non-integrated schools (Appendix B, Table B4, and Appendix D, Figure D4). Nearly 44% of magnet school parents report incomes above $25,000, compared with 11.7% of parents with children in integrated schools and 15.5% of non-integrated school parents. Thirty-two percent of magnet school parents have general household income below $15,000, compared with 67.5% of the integrated non-magnet school parents and 62.7% of the non-integrated school parents.

These social class differences between magnet and non-magnet schools are consistent for all racial groups. For minority parents in magnet schools, 42.6% have income levels below $15,000, compared with 74.7% of minority parents in integrated non-magnet schools and 62.7% in non-integrated schools. Of minority parents in magnet schools, 7.6% have incomes above $50,000, compared with 0.7% of minority parents in integrated schools and 4.3% of minority parents in non-integrated schools. Similar trends are evident for white parents. Nineteen percent of white parents in magnet schools have incomes below $15,000, compared with 55.4% of white parents in non-magnet schools, while 17.9% of white parents in magnet schools have incomes above $50,000, compared with 2.7% in integrated non-magnet schools.

Family Structure. Students from magnet schools are more likely to come from two-parent families. Fifty-five percent of the magnet school parents responding to this survey are married, compared with 26.5% of the integrated non-magnet school parents and 21.3% of the non-integrated school parents who responded. In addition, 13% of the magnet school parents who responded have never married, compared with 33.2% of the integrated non-magnet school parents and 43.6% of the non-integrated school parents who responded.

This trend of significant differences between magnet and non-magnet parents with respect to family structure holds across race as well (Appendix D, Figure D1). That is, for minorities as well as whites, magnet schools have more two-parent families than in both types of non-magnet schools and non-magnet schools of both types have more single-parent families than magnet schools. Specifically, 41.7% of the respondent minority parents in magnet schools are married and 22.3% are single. In integrated non-magnet schools, 19.2% of the minority parents are married and 39.7% are single parents, while in non-integrated schools 21.8% of the minori-

ty parents are married and 43.7% are single. For white parents, 70.1% of those responding in magnet schools are married, compared with 40.5% married in integrated non-magnet schools; 1.6% of the white respondents in magnet schools are single parents, while in integrated non-magnet schools, 19% of the white parents are single. Magnet school parents also have significantly fewer children living in the same household than non-magnet parents.

Educational Level. Similar trends are evident in regard to the educational level of parents. Parents in magnet schools, across all racial groups, are more likely to have higher educational levels than their counterparts in both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools (Appendix D, Figure D2). For example, in St. Louis only 8% of magnet school parents have not completed high school, compared with 45.2% of integrated non-magnet school parents and 33% of non-integrated school parents. In addition, 22.4% of the magnet school respondents are college graduates, compared with 7.5% of the integrated school respondents and 11.3% of the non-integrated school respondents. Eleven percent of the magnet school parents hold graduate degrees, compared with 2.7% of the integrated non-magnet school parents and 4% of the non-integrated school parents.

This trend is similar for both minority and white parents. Twenty-three percent of magnet school minority parents who responded are college graduates, compared with 11.8% of integrated non-magnet minority parents and 10.7% of non-integrated minority parents. In magnet schools 6.3% of the minority parents hold graduate degrees, compared with 2.4% in integrated non-magnet schools and 4.1% in non-integrated schools. Among white parents in magnet schools, 21.3% are college graduates and 14.9% hold graduate degrees, while in integrated non-magnet schools, 1.7% of the white parents are college graduates and 3.3% hold graduate degrees.

Employment Status. Parents in magnet schools are more likely to be employed than are parents in non-magnet schools (Appendix D, Figure D3). In magnet schools, 11.3% of the parents indicate that neither parent is employed (either full- or part-time), compared with 38.2% of the integrated school parents and 39.8% of the non-integrated school parents. Among minority parents in magnet schools, 13.6% indicate that neither parent is employed, compared with 39.3% in integrated non-magnet schools and 39.8% in non-integrated schools. Among white parents in magnet schools, 8.1% are unemployed; in contrast, 36.0% of the white parents in integrated non-magnet schools are unemployed.

Suburban St. Louis

The fourth type of choice available to minority parents in St. Louis is to send their children out of the city to suburban schools. More minority parents chose this option than chose magnet schools (12,775 versus 5,890) in the 1993-94 school year. The minority families who choose this option are similar to the families of minority magnet school students. The parents' sources of information and reasons for choice are also similar, with some important differences that seem based on school location.

Minority parents who send their children outside the St. Louis district to suburban schools are quite similar in socio-economic terms to minority parents who choose magnet schools. The responses show that minority parents choosing suburban schools are not significantly different from minority magnet school parents in terms of income, family status, or employment. For example, 42.6% of minority magnet parents have incomes below $15,000 and 41.9% of minority parents who choose suburban schools are low income, while 34.2% of minority magnet parents have incomes above $25,000, compared with 25.9% of minority parents who choose suburban schools. Family status is also similar—46.2% of minority magnet families are two-parent and 44.4% of minority families who choose the suburbs are two-parent. This compares with 25.2% for minority families in integrated non-magnets and 25.4% of families in the non-integrated schools.

In terms of employment, 25.1% of minority magnet families have two parents who are both employed full-time, compared with 25.8% of minority families choosing the suburban schools. Only 13.6% of magnet parents are both unemployed, and 16.1% of suburban minority parents are both unem-

ployed. That compares with 39.3% of minority integrated non-magnet parents and 39.8% of non-integrated school parents.

Minority magnet school parents have significantly higher educational levels, however, than parents who choose suburban schools. Nearly 30% of magnet school parents have finished college or have advanced degrees versus 19% of parents choosing suburban schools. While only 10.6% of minority magnet parents and 9.5% of minority suburban transfer parents have less than a high school education or GED, 41.2% of minority integrated non-magnet parents and 32.8% of minority non-integrated non-magnet parents have not finished high school.

In summary, although both magnet and integrated non-magnet schools in St. Louis are racially balanced, it is clear that magnet schools enroll students whose parents are of higher socio-economic status with regard to employment, educational level, family structure, and income. These differences are consistent for all racial groups and for both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools. However, the socio-economic status of non-integrated school parents is also slightly higher than those of integrated non-magnet school parents.

(B) Sources of Information

Parents have access to and use various sources of information as they begin the process of choosing a school. In this section we ask the questions: (1) What types of information do parents use when making a choice? (2) Do different racial groups use different types of information? (3) How satisfied are parents with the information available to them?

Cincinnati

Cincinnati's magnet school parents use a variety of sources of information to learn about their public school alternatives to neighborhood assignment. As Table A5 (Appendix A) indicates, the most frequently used source of information is parents' friends. A large majority of parents, 66%, report that they talk with friends to learn about alternative schools. The second most prevalent source of information is visits to schools, followed by discussions with teachers and discussions with their child. Thirty-four percent of the parents report that they use achievement test scores as a source of information in making a decision about where to send their child to school. The least utilized sources of information include school newsletters; radio, TV and newspapers; information centers; and informational meetings.

We investigated whether the use of various sources of information differs according to race. A few statistically significant differences emerged. In magnet schools, white parents are more likely than minority parents to use conversations with friends as a source of information (75% of white parents compared with 58% of minority parents). Similarly, white parents are more likely than minority parents to use information obtained in discussions with their child (50% compared with 31%). White parents are also more likely than minority parents to use information obtained from visits to schools (58% compared with 43%), as well as achievement test scores (46% compared with 22%), as sources of information.

In addition to examining the most frequently used sources of information, we explored the relative importance of these sources. When the most important sources of information are compared for white and minority parents in magnet schools, significant differences emerge. For white parents in magnet schools, the most important sources of information include discussions with friends, their other children's experiences at the school, and visits to schools. For minority parents, talking to teachers, achievement test scores, and their other children's experiences at the school are most important. Thus, it is interesting to note that few minority parents use achievement test scores as a source of information, but for those who do, it is reported as an important source of information.

In summary, minority parents in magnet schools are less likely than white parents to use as sources of information school visits, their own child, and discussions with friends. Significant differences also exist in the likelihood that parents will use achievement test scores. White parents are the most likely to use achievement tests as a source of information

(39% report using this type of information), compared with minority parents (19.5%).

We also explored whether there are social class differences in the frequency of use of sources of information. Table A6 (Appendix A) presents the percentage of parents indicating their use of various sources of information by income level. A few significant differences emerged. The higher the income of parents, the more likely they are to use discussions with teachers and friends as sources of information. Upper-income parents are also more likely to use school visits and achievement test scores in making a decision about where to send their child to school.

St. Louis

In St. Louis, magnet school parents use a similar array of sources of information to learn about public school alternatives to neighborhood assignment. As Table B5 (Appendix B) indicates, the most frequently used source of information is discussions with their child (49.5%) followed by discussions with friends (43.4%) and teachers (42.0%). As in Cincinnati, among the least utilized sources of information are institutional sources such as radio, TV, and newspapers (10.4%), and informational meetings (12.7%).

Among magnet school parents, white parents are more likely than minority parents to use information obtained in discussions with their child (62.1% compared with 39.7%). White parents are also more likely than minority parents to use information obtained from visits to schools (47.9% compared to 30.4%). White parents are more likely to talk to teachers than minority parents (47.4% compared with 37.7%) and to talk to friends (47.9% compared with 37.7%). Minority parents are more likely to consult school newsletters (36.6% compared with 23.7%), go to informational meetings (14.8% compared with 8.9%), and consider achievement test scores (19.1% compared with 12.6%).

When the most important sources of information are compared for white and minority parents in St. Louis magnet schools, significant differences emerge. For white parents in magnet schools, the most important sources of information include discussions with their child, discussions with teachers, consideration of their other children's experiences at the school, visits to schools, and discussions with friends, in that order. For minority parents, discussions with teachers, discussions with their child, discussions with friends, achievement test scores, and school newsletters were the five most important sources of information.

These findings indicate that the two most important sources of information for both white and black parents are discussions with teachers and discussions with their children, although the order of the two is reversed for the two races. White parents are less likely to use institutional information, such as achievement test scores and school newsletters, for their decision-making, and are more likely to visit schools than black parents.

We also explored whether social class affected the frequency of use of sources of information. Table B6 (Appendix B) presents for each income level the percentage of parents indicating their use of various sources of information. A few significant differences emerged. The higher the income of parents, the more likely they are to use discussions with teachers and friends and their own children as sources of information. Upper-income parents are also more likely to use school visits and achievement test scores in making a decision about where to send their child to school.

Suburban St. Louis

The minority parents who choose suburban schools base their school selection decisions on somewhat different sources of information than minority magnet school parents. Minority parents who choose suburban schools are less likely to use achievement test scores as a source of information (7.7% compared with 19.1% of minority magnet school parents) and less likely to talk to teachers than minority magnet school parents (28.2% compared with 37.7%). They are more likely to use informal, social networks such as discussions with friends (51.3% compared with 40.1%), their child (48.7% compared with 39.7%), their other children (25.6% compared with 14.8%), and other family members (29.2% compared with 19.8%). This may reflect the difficulty inner-city parents have in trav-

eling to the suburbs, although magnet and suburban school parents reported using visits to schools as a source of information about equally (30.4% of magnet parents compared with 33.3% of suburban school parents).

When it comes to the importance of those sources of information in the actual decision, minority parents who choose suburban schools also seem to use their social network more intensively than magnet school parents (see Appendix B, Table B10). For example, while 25.6% of minority magnet parents say discussions with teachers are their most important source of information, 22.9% of parents choosing suburban schools say talking to their child is their most important source of information. Suburban parents are more likely than minority magnet parents to talk to their friends (17.1% compared with 12.3%) and other family members (8.6% compared with 1.5%). Despite the distance, parents choosing the suburban schools are more likely than minority magnet school parents to say visits to the school are their most important source of information (11.4% compared with 6.9%).

Consistent with the survey results, the findings from the multiple-case studies indicate that parents' social networks play a central and fundamental role in the source, level, and type of information utilized in the context of choice. These networks are an indicator of the importance of information gathering and exchange to the ways in which parents participate in choice decisions. During in-depth interviews with magnet school parents, there were repeated references to kin, co-workers, and, in some cases, "the woman down the street" as sources of information regarding the magnet program and specific magnet schools. There is strong evidence from this qualitative study that rather than investigate school options in a systematic, deliberate, or rational fashion, parents tend to "luck into" the system of school choice.

The "word-of-mouth" channel was underscored and distinguished from somewhat more deliberate district- and magnet school-level information dissemination activities, such as mailings, meetings, and media outreach. Although most parents reported that they are aware of district- and school-level policies designed to provide accurate and accessible information to parents regarding choice options, these sources emerged as far less salient than parents' social and professional networks. As one Cincinnati magnet school (white) parent noted, "I know it gets into the paper, but unless that is something you are looking for, you don't see it." Other parents noted that information regarding the magnet system is more easily collected due to their own or a relative's employment in the school district. An African American mother whose child is enrolled in the math and science magnet in Cincinnati noted, "The only reason that I know as much as I do is not just because I'm a concerned parent. There are a lot of concerned parents out there. The only reason that I know is because I'm part of (the school system)."

In summary, the Cincinnati and St. Louis data indicate that different racial groups and social classes use different types of information and assign different levels of importance to them. However, certain types of information seem to be more useful to parents choosing magnet schools. Magnet parents seem to rely heavily on their own personal resources, such as friends, family, and their children. They also explore specific schools by talking to teachers, visiting schools, and checking achievement test scores. Parents do not seem to be utilizing organized information from the school district, such as newsletters, information centers, and meetings, as well as radio and TV ads. One exception is minority magnet parents who seem to be more likely to turn to institutional sources of information than white magnet parents, supplementing their social networks.

These findings underscore the central role and function of parents' social networks for gathering information within the context of school choice decision-making. These networks may lead to stable and predictable sources of information regarding school climate, curriculum, and application deadlines. However, as this and other studies indicate, (for example, Cochran, 1990; Cochran & Brassard, 1979; Lareau, 1989), the relative importance of social networks is directly related to social class.

That is, the development and utilization of parents' primary social networks are linked to issues of neighborhood stability and isolation, access to transportation and civic-community organizations, and occupations which promote workplace associations (Cochran, 1990; Lareau, 1989). As a consequence of the relationship between social-class structure and social networks, the pool of resources from which low-income parents can draw to make decisions regarding school choice programs may be somewhat smaller than the one available to middle-class parents (Smrekar, in press).

(C) Parents' Reasons for Choice

We asked parents to identify the issues that are important to them in selecting a school for their child, using a list of 21 possible reasons for choice.

Cincinnati

The most prevalent reasons reported from all parents are the academic reputation of the school (72.0%), teaching style (64.7%), and availability of transportation (50.7%) (see Appendix A, Table A7).

We also asked the teachers in each school to indicate their perceptions of the reasons that parents choose their particular school, using the same list of possible reasons with the addition of "no choice." Sixty-nine percent of magnet teachers report that parents choose the school due to its strong academic reputation (Appendix A, Table A8). Nearly 30% of magnet school teachers indicate that parents choose the school because it is near their home.

Social class seems to influence parents' reasons for choosing a magnet school. Higher income parents are significantly more likely to choose a school because of its academic reputation. Similarly, higher income parents are more likely to choose because of a school's values and beliefs and because of the principal. In contrast, lower income parents are significantly more likely to choose on the basis of the availability of special services, individual help, and transportation (Appendix A, Table A9).

To what extent are differences in parents' reasons for choice related to race? In magnet schools race influences some reasons for choice. Both white and minority parents are equally likely to choose magnet schools because of academic reputation. White parents in magnet schools, however, are significantly more likely to choose a magnet school because it is located near their home (50.7% white, compared with 15% minority). White parents are also significantly more likely than minority parents to indicate they choose a magnet school because of the teaching style, parental involvement, the child's friends, teachers, and the principal. In contrast, minority parents in magnet schools are more likely to indicate they choose a magnet school because of the availability of more individual help for their child, the racial/ethnic mix of the school, and availability of transportation.

Transportation is a major issue for many parents when choosing a school. We asked parents if there are public schools in the district that they did not consider due to the lack of available transportation. Of those parents in both magnet and non-magnet schools who actively sought to make a choice, 13.4% answered yes to this question. Minority parents in both magnets and non-magnets are significantly more likely to indicate that transportation is an issue (18.2% and 15.1%, respectively). White parents in magnet schools are the least likely to indicate that transportation is a consideration in choosing a school (7.6%). (This is consistent with white parents' indication that their selection of a magnet school is based on proximity to their home.) Additionally, lower income parents are more likely than higher income parents to be concerned about transportation. Specifically, 17.4% of the lower income parents choose magnet and non-magnet schools indicate that they did not consider certain schools because of the unavailability of transportation, compared with 12.8% of medium-income parents, 13.7% of medium-high-income parents, and only 9.8% of high-income parents.

St. Louis

In St. Louis, the most prevalent reasons reported by all magnet school parents are the academic reputation of the school (62.0%), teaching style (53.9%), availability of special programs (48.9%),

and transportation (42.67%) (Appendix B, Table B7).

Seventy-one percent of the magnet teachers report that parents choose the school because of the strong academic reputation, and 68.7% say it is because of the teaching style (Appendix B, Table B8). The racial/ethnic mix is also cited as an important reason parents are choosing magnet schools (67.3%), along with the availability of transportation (66.8%) and special programs (61.3%). Large percentages of both magnet and non-integrated non-magnet teachers report that parents are choosing based on having another child in the school (74.8% and 55.5%, respectively).

Teachers reported overwhelmingly that "no choice/zone" or "near home" are the reasons both integrated and non-integrated magnet students attend their school (83.2% and 74.2%, respectively for "no choice," and 57.8% and 76.9%, respectively for "near home").

Social class seems to influence parents' reasons for choosing a magnet school. Higher income parents are significantly more likely to choose schools because of the academic reputation, teaching style, and special programs of the school. In contrast, lower income parents are significantly more likely to choose on the basis of proximity to their home (Appendix B, Table B9).

To what extent are differences in parents' reasons for choice related to race? In magnet schools race influences few important reasons for choice. Both white and minority parents are equally likely to choose magnet schools because of academic reputation, teaching style, and availability of individual help. White parents are more likely to choose a magnet school because of special programs, because they like the neighborhood and the teachers, or because their children's friends go to the school. Minority parents, on the other hand, are more likely than white parents to choose a magnet school because of the racial/ethnic mix, opportunities for parental involvement, and shared values of the school.

In St. Louis, of those parents in magnet and both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools who actively sought to make a choice, 41.5% say there are schools in the district they did not consider because of the lack of transportation. Minority parents in integrated non-magnets are significantly more likely to indicate that transportation is an issue than minority magnet parents (52.8% compared with 8.8%). White parents in magnet schools are the least likely to indicate that transportation is a consideration in choosing a school (5.1%). Additionally, lower income parents are more likely than higher income parents to be concerned about transportation. Specifically, 26.3% of the lower income choosers of all three types of schools indicate that they did not consider certain schools because of the unavailability of transportation, compared with 10.8% of medium-income parents, 9.1% of medium-high-income parents, and only 3.8% of high-income parents.

Suburban St. Louis

For parents in magnet schools and suburban schools, as Table B11 (Appendix B) indicates, the most important reason for that choice is the academic strength of the schools (41.4% of magnet school parents and 33.3% of suburban school parents).

The evidence from the interviews conducted with parents and teachers in magnet schools in St. Louis and Cincinnati suggests that parents' reasons for choice fall within three general categories of preference and priority: (1) ensuring a safe and secure school environment; (2) selecting an academic focus that is compatible with their child's interests or needs; and (3) exercising an option that is (at least) a better choice than their neighborhood school. While some parents who selected the math-science magnet in Cincinnati discussed an interest in enhancing their children's knowledge in those specific content areas, most parents indicated a taken-for-granted approach toward a system (magnet) perceived to be better than the neighborhood schools. For most parents, "better" translates into a safer school with notably greater discipline and quieter, more controlled classrooms. Issues of safety, security, and proximity are recalled repeatedly by parents when they are asked to reconstruct their decisions. This response from a parent in Cincinnati is typical:

Question: "What did you know about the (math-science) magnet school when you sent your son there?

Answer: "Not a lot. I just felt it was a better neighborhood and a better school to go to than the one they would have had to go to downtown."

To be sure, parents believe that the "better" conditions found in magnet schools translate into an environment that is more conducive to learning. In the survey, this finding is reflected by the significant number of parents who report that they choose a school based upon its general "academic reputation." For most parents, however, the "choice" is really a non-issue in the sense that these parents make broad assumptions regarding the inferior quality of neighborhood schools compared with magnet schools. In a comment that captured this consensus view, one parent remarked, "It wasn't really that I was running to something good as I was running away from something I knew was not good."

Part 2: Communal Opportunities to Learn

The concept of "opportunity to learn" has evolved considerably in recent years. Attempting to illuminate the factors that may influence student achievement, researchers initially conceptualized learning opportunity in terms of a relatively narrow set of indicators of student exposure to subject area content, or "the opportunity to study the topics represented in the test" (Osafehinti, 1987). The early indicators used to assess learning opportunities include: the amount of time spent in school (defined in terms of the length of the school day or school year); the amount of coverage of a subject area, the sequence and pace of instruction, and the relative emphasis placed on various subjects or topics by teachers (assessed variously by amount of time or number of lessons teachers devote to particular topics, or even by the number of pages in the textbook devoted to the areas tested); and actual student time-on-task (Bennett, 1987; Anderson, 1991).

Broader definitions of learning opportunity began to emerge in the late 1980s. These expanded conceptualizations were incorporated into the Goals 2000: Educate America Act enacted in 1994. The legislation calls on states to develop voluntarily their own customized set of "opportunity to learn standards" that will help them reach the eight national goals set forth in the act. States are asked to adopt standards that will allow them to "measure schools' capacity to deliver adequate services" (*Education Week*, September 21, 1994, p. 19) as well as address each of the following:

1. the quality of curriculum and instructional materials;
2. teachers' capability to effectively teach challenging standards to all students;
3. teachers' professional development, focused on helping all students reach challenging standards; and
4. the extent to which school curriculum and instructional strategies are aligned with challenging content standards (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

Absent from this discussion is the concept of parental involvement that has received so much attention in terms of its relationship to student learning. The concept of communal opportunity to learn explicitly recognizes the critical role played by parents in building and reinforcing the capacity of the school to produce student learning. Indicators of communal opportunities for learning thus should measure the extent to which a school encourages and facilitates parental involvement.

We assume that communal opportunities to learn include (1) school information provided to parents; (2) parental influence on school policies; (3) level of parent involvement at school; (4) teacher communication with parents; (5) parent-parent interactions outside of school; and (6) a caring, supportive school climate that welcomes parents. Further elaboration of these analyses and variables may be found in Appendix E.

There are relatively low levels of communal opportunities to learn in all Cincinnati and St. Louis schools (see Appendix E, Table E2). Parents in both magnet and non-magnet schools report that they

(1) are rarely involved in school activities, (2) have very little influence in school decision-making, and (3) rarely have contact with other parents. On average, parents also report that they rarely receive information about the school from school personnel, their child, or other sources, and have only occasional communications from their child's teacher. The next sections describe some differences in the magnitude (for example the levels of parental involvement) of communal opportunities to learn between magnet and non-magnet schools. We should not overlook, however, the fact that in all schools in the sample, parents' reports indicate limited interactions with their children's schools and teachers (see Appendix E, Table E2).

Cincinnati

Statistical analyses indicate that communal opportunities are different in magnet and non-magnet zone schools in Cincinnati. Controlling for family income, magnet school parents report a more supportive school climate than do non-magnet school parents. Magnet school parents are also more likely to indicate that they are involved in their child's school and that they receive more frequent information about the school than do non-magnet school parents.

We examined the level of home-school communication by asking parents to indicate how often they receive information about their child's school. On average, parents in magnet schools report receiving significantly more frequent communication across all sources (including their own child, school personnel, family, and newspapers) than do parents in non-magnet schools. However, the results of the analysis of the total sample across magnets and non-magnets indicate that minority parents in all schools report receiving information less frequently than white parents.

Variables that are marginally important in differentiating magnet from non-magnet schools are levels of teacher communication with parents and frequency of parent-parent interactions. Non-magnet school parents report more frequent communications with other parents and more frequent communication with their children's teachers, than do magnet school parents. There are no differences in the levels of parental influence reported by magnet and non-magnet school parents.

Barriers to Parental Involvement at School

Many parents cannot be involved in school activities because of special needs, such as transportation, child care, different meeting times. We asked parents in Cincinnati whether they had special needs that affected their ability to attend conferences with teachers or other meetings at school. There is no significant difference between parents in magnet schools and non-magnet schools in terms of any special needs. There are some differences, however, in all schools based on race and income levels. In both magnet and non-magnet schools, minority parents are significantly more likely to indicate they have special needs than are white parents. This difference is much larger in magnet schools than in non-magnet schools. Specifically, 62.5% of the minority parents in magnet schools indicate that they have special needs, compared with only 33.1% of the white parents. In non-magnet schools, 59.1% of the minority parents and 45.0% of the white parents indicate that they have special needs. The most prevalent need for all parents relates to scheduled school meeting times. Minority parents in both magnet and non-magnet schools are twice as likely to have this need compared with white parents. On the other hand, white parents indicate a greater need for child care.

Low-income parents in magnet schools are significantly more likely to indicate they have special needs than are low-income parents in non-magnet schools. Specifically 71.6% of the low- income parents in magnet schools indicate they have special needs, compared with 53.4% of the low-income parents in non-magnet schools. There are no differences for other income groups. The greatest needs for low-income parents in magnet schools are transportation (37.5%), different meeting times (34.1%), and child care for other children (20.5%). For low-income parents in non-magnet schools, the needs are different meeting times (29%), transportation (21%), and child care (11%).

We asked teachers their perceptions of possible

barriers to parental involvement. Magnet teachers are significantly more likely to indicate that distance and travel are barriers to parental involvement in school compared with teachers in non-magnet schools. In addition, magnet teachers are significantly more likely to indicate parents' work schedules are a barrier to parental involvement than non-magnet teachers. In contrast, non-magnet teachers are significantly more likely to indicate parental apathy as a barrier to parental involvement. Specifically, 50.3% of the non-magnet teachers, compared with only 17.8% of the magnet teachers, indicate that parental apathy often affects parental involvement in the school. There are no differences in the extent to which magnet and non-magnet teachers report that parents do not feel welcome in the school.

St. Louis

As we found in the Cincinnati data, communal opportunities are different in magnet, integrated non-magnet, and non-integrated schools in St. Louis. The difference often favors the non-magnet schools, especially in areas that involve a sense of neighborhood or community. However, controlling for differences in parental income, magnet school parents perceive a supportive, caring climate that welcomes parental involvement. Controlling for family income, magnet school parents report a more supportive school climate than do both integrated and non-integrated school parents. Another important difference is the level of parental involvement. Magnet school and non-integrated school parents feel more involved and have more contact with teachers than integrated non-magnet school parents. Levels of parental influence are highest among parents of non-integrated school students, with little difference between the level of influence reported by magnet and integrated non-magnet school parents.

With respect to levels of home-school communication, on average, parents in magnet schools report receiving significantly more frequent communication across all sources (including their own child, school personnel, family, and newspapers) than do parents in non-magnet schools. However, the results of the analysis of the total sample across magnets and non-magnets indicate that minority parents in all schools report receiving information less frequently than white parents. In short, magnet school parents, both white and minority across low- and high-income levels, report receiving information about the school more frequently than parents in non-magnet schools. In both magnet and integrated non-magnet schools, minority and low-income parents report receiving less frequent communication about the school than do white parents and higher income parents.

Both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet school parents report more frequent communications with other parents and more frequent communication with their children's teachers than do magnet school parents.

Barriers to Parental Involvement at School

In St. Louis, there is no significant difference between parents in magnet schools and both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools in terms of any special needs (such as transportation, child care, different meeting times). There are some differences, however, in all schools based on race and income levels. In magnet and both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools, minority parents are significantly more likely to indicate they have special needs than are white parents. This difference is much larger in magnet schools than in non-magnet schools. Specifically, 61.9% of the minority parents in magnet schools indicate that they have special needs, compared with 45.3% of the white parents. In integrated non-magnet schools, 59.7% of the minority parents and 42.3% of the white parents indicate that they have special needs. In non-integrated schools 54.4% of the parents indicate they have special needs. The most pressing need for all parents relates to scheduled school meeting times. Minority parents in both magnet and integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools are more likely to have this need compared with white parents.

Low-income parents in magnet schools are significantly more likely to indicate they have special needs than are low-income parents in non-magnet schools. Specifically 67.6% of the low-income (below

$15,000) parents in magnet schools indicate they have special needs, compared with 55.8% of the low-income parents in integrated non-magnet schools and 60.0% in non-integrated non-magnets. Higher income (above $50,000) parents of magnet school students are significantly less likely to need special help to participate in school activities than higher income integrated and non-integrated non-magnet school parents. Of these parents, 34.6% of magnet school parents say they need special help, compared with 66.7% of integrated non-magnet school parents and 54.5% of non-integrated school parents. The greatest needs for low-income parents in magnet schools are transportation (37.4%), different meeting times (37.4%), and child care for other children (18.7%). For low-income parents in integrated non-magnet schools, the needs are transportation (23.1%), different meeting times (17.9%), and child care (11.5%). In the non-integrated schools, the greatest needs for low-income parents are different meeting times (30.0%), child care (22.5%), and transportation (13.3%).

Suburban St. Louis

Overall, minority parents choosing suburban schools report significantly less involvement with their child's school than any of the other three types of schools. Suburban school parents are the least involved of all the four types of schools in St. Louis, yet the parents choosing suburban schools are the most satisfied with the climate of warmth and caring at their child's school. Along with magnet parents, they report less communication with teachers than integrated and non-integrated school parents.

Along with minority magnet parents, suburban school parents report less communication with teachers than their minority integrated and non-integrated counterparts. Minority parents choosing suburban schools report significantly less parent-parent interaction (1.2, SD=32, compared with 1.4, SD=54 for magnet school parents).

In terms of special needs, fewer suburban school minority parents report having special needs, except for the greater need for transportation to school meetings, than their city district counterparts (51.3% compared with 22.7% for minority magnet parents, 20.1% for minority integrated non-magnet parents, and 11.0% for non-integrated parents.)

Magnet teachers in St. Louis are significantly more likely to indicate that distance and travel are barriers to parental involvement in school when compared with teachers in both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools. Magnet teachers are somewhat more likely to indicate parents' work schedules are "often" a barrier to parental involvement than both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet teachers. In contrast, integrated non-magnet teachers are significantly more likely to indicate parental apathy is "often" a barrier to parental involvement. Specifically, 47.7% of the integrated non-magnet teachers, compared with only 14.6% of the magnet teachers and 23.3% of the non-integrated non-magnet teachers, indicate that parental apathy often affects parental involvement in the school. There is little difference in the extent to which magnet and non-magnet teachers report that parents do not feel welcome in the school.

These findings are mirrored in the magnet school case studies. The interview and observation data indicate predictably high levels of shared values and support between parents and teachers, with correspondingly strong measures of clear and consistent patterns of communication. In the absence of geographical community, however, these constituent elements of community are lacking in the social relations and structures *among parents* in magnet schools. A sense of diversity and division—geographical and social—is represented in the school portraits drawn by parents in both the Cincinnati and St. Louis schools. Social networks are thin and tenuous among school parents separated by distance and social class differences. The persistence of insularity driven by the exigencies of work and family lives makes occasions for face-to-face interactions among school parents typically brief, unpredictable, and unrelated. In the absence of unifying activities, such as after-school sports, scouting, band, or theater, few magnet school parents know one another. At the same time, many parents express profound regret regarding the unraveling of a sense of community within their own neighborhoods—a consequence, they argue, of

busing and the magnet school program. This observation by an African American parent echoed other parents' comments: "The communities aren't communities anymore.... Once you start busing and everybody is going all over the place, you don't have a community anymore. You don't have the parents going together to the PTA meetings, sports, or extracurricular activities." A white parent noted, "I really don't know any of the parents except one who happens to be a friend of my sister's." A middle-class mother (African American) reported, "Nobody knows anybody anymore," and suggested that the cross-town transportation involved in any after-school meeting and event complicate already hectic, time-compressed work and family lives. This problem is particularly onerous for low-income parents dependent upon public transportation in Cincinnati and St. Louis. Many single parents note that the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities is exacerbated by the time involved in participating in a school-based event when school is a 30–45 minute (one-way) ride away from home. For most parents, the sense of anonymity in the magnet schools tends to overwhelm the tenuous bonds of school-community membership. As the president of the PTA at one Cincinnati magnet school put it after noting the typically and disappointingly small group of parents in attendance at the year's events, "You can't have a sense of local community when it is not your local community."

In summary, despite the overall low levels of communal opportunities to learn (involvement, influence, communication) in all schools, magnet schools seem to provide parents with a sense that their schools welcome parents and have a caring, supportive school climate. This finding supports the idea that parents who choose a school often perceive they are a part of a school community with unity of purpose and social cohesion (Smrekar, 1993).

It should be noted that these findings may be the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy among magnet school parents. This argument suggests that when an investment is associated with making a choice, whether it be time, energy, or other ancillary issues, parents tend to report higher levels of satisfaction. "It is generally assumed parents who invest in their child's education by actively making a choice will view their schools favorably. Even if there are no visible reasons for the choice to lead to satisfaction, many parents may justify their choice and investment by indicating satisfaction with the school and viewing it through 'rose colored glasses'" (Goldring & Shapira, 1994, p. 399).

The findings also seem to suggest that there is more parental involvement in magnet schools than in neighborhood schools in both Cincinnati and St. Louis. Parents in magnet schools report attending more school activities, volunteering more frequently, and coming to school to discuss problems. However, in all types of schools in both cities the involvement is at relatively low levels. The level of involvement of parents who choose the suburban schools in St. Louis is even lower. Research has suggested that schools that share a unity of purpose and a common agenda for all participants are better able to promote and support higher levels of parental involvement (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Bauch & Goldring, 1995).

In contrast to the higher levels of parental involvement in magnet schools, there seems to be more teacher communication with home in the non-magnet schools. In addition, parents in non-magnet schools seem to interact with each other more frequently. These two areas may be linked to the geographic community. When parents live close to one another, they have more opportunities to interact with each other on an ongoing, informal basis. These face-to-face interactions between parents provide crucial opportunities for informal networking and the sharing of information that can contribute to expanding the school community to include parents (Smrekar, in press).

Part 3: Magnet and Non-magnet School Conditions

In this section we explore conditions of learning for students and conditions of work for teachers in magnet and non-magnet schools. Specifically we examine student enrollment stability, curriculum and instruction, teacher backgrounds, and workplace conditions.

Cincinnati

School enrollment stability

Parents in Cincinnati magnet schools report, on average, that their fifth-grade child has been attending the present school for 5.0 years (SD=1.8), whereas non-magnet parents report on average that their fifth grader has been attending the school for 3.9 years (SD=1.9)—a statistically significant difference.

It is important to investigate further the issues of student mobility and enrollment stability in terms of race and income level. The difference between magnet and non-magnet schools holds across all income levels and racial groups, except for medium-high-income groups. Specifically, even for low-income families (household income less than $15,000), magnet schools have greater stability in their student enrollment (4.8 years) than non-magnet schools (3.9 years). This is also the case across all racial groups. Even if we control for the number of years families have lived in the city and exclude those who have not lived in Cincinnati for five years or more, this relationship holds. That is, student enrollment in magnet schools is more stable than that in non-magnet schools. These findings reflect the fact that magnet schools have the advantage of being city-wide schools; that is, even if parents move, their children are able to continue in the same school, since placement in these schools presently is not constrained by neighborhood assignment.

In order to assess stability further, we also asked parents about the other schools their child may have attended. As presented in Table A10 (Appendix A), magnet school parents are significantly more likely to indicate that the present school is the only school their child has ever attended. In all schools, whites are more likely than minority parents to indicate that the present school is the only school their child has attended. This difference by race is much less pronounced in magnet schools, however, than in non-magnet schools (Appendix A, Table A11). Seventy-five percent of whites in magnet schools indicate their child has not attended another school, compared with 67.9% of minority parents (note that this difference is not statistically significant). In non-magnet schools, whites are significantly more likely to report that their child has not attended another school (50.6%), compared with minority parents (34.3%). Across all income levels, magnet parents are more likely to indicate the magnet school is the only school their child has attended since first grade (Appendix A, Table A12).

Curriculum and Instruction

We asked principals of the schools in our sample to provide us with information on various aspects of the curricular and instructional programs available in each school. There are no differences between magnet and non-magnet schools in the way that instruction is generally organized for fifth-grade students. Instruction is most commonly provided to fifth graders in self-contained classrooms, while the next most prevalent format is multi-age, multi-grade. Principals were asked to indicate whether the school employs a full-time librarian, art teacher, and music teacher, rather than sharing these teacher resources with other schools. We found no differences between magnet and non-magnet schools in the employment of full-time personnel in these ancillary areas. We also found no differences in the extent to which magnet and non-magnet schools offer various school-sponsored extracurricular activities, such as sports, instrumental music/band, chorus, dance, theater, visual arts, clubs, and field trips. Additionally, there are no differences in the extent to which schools provide transportation to students to permit them to participate in these extracurricular activities. Finally, no differences between magnet and non-magnet schools were discovered in the availability of various other special programs for students at the school, such as before- and after-school child care, preschool programs, and special education.

The data from teacher surveys reflect some significant differences between magnet and non-magnet schools with respect to curriculum and instruction. First, we found some significant differences in the ways teachers in magnet schools and non-magnet schools work. On average, teachers in

magnet schools are significantly more likely to report that they team teach more hours during a typical day (magnet schools mean=1.5, SD=2.3; non-magnet schools mean=.81, SD=1.6) and to have more flexibility in their curriculum than do non-magnet teachers. Magnet teachers are more likely to agree with such statements as, "Instructional time at this school is flexible," and "Most teachers at this school vary instructional strategies to meet their students' learning styles."

There are no significant differences between magnet and non-magnet teachers in terms of the number of students in their classes who have Individualized Education Plans or have special needs. There are also no differences in the average number of instructional hours during the school day that students with special needs are taught outside the classroom; for all teachers the average is four hours. In addition, there are no differences in the number of students who leave the classroom for gifted education programs. There is a significant difference, however, between magnet and non-magnet schools in the number of students who leave the classroom for remedial programs in reading, language arts, or mathematics. In magnet schools, on average, 2.6 students leave the classroom during a typical day for remedial programs, compared with an average of 4.7 students in non-magnet schools.

We asked teachers how they allocate their teaching during a typical day to different instructional strategies, such as whole class lecture, grouping, peer tutoring, and seatwork. There are no significant differences between magnet teachers and non-magnet teachers in the strategies they use for instruction.

Teacher Backgrounds

One of the major criticisms of magnet schools is that the "creaming effect" also occurs with respect to district-wide faculty assignment; that is, not only do magnets attract the "best" students, they also attract the best teachers in the district. We thus examined differences in the teaching forces of magnet and non-magnet schools.

There are no significant differences by school type in the percentage of teachers who are regular full- time, certified teachers. On average, 91.5% of all teachers are full-time, while 83.9% have regular certifications. There are, however, significant differences in the average educational levels of teachers in magnet and non-magnet schools. Magnet school teachers are more likely to hold master's degrees and other graduate degrees than are non-magnet school teachers. There are also significant differences in the ethnic background of magnet and non-magnet school teachers. Magnet schools have more minority teachers than do non-magnet schools.

There are no differences in the length of time teachers have been teaching at their particular school. The average tenure at the present school is six years for all teachers.

We asked teachers why they chose a position at their present school. Non-magnet teachers are twice as likely to indicate that they had no choice (24.7%), compared with magnet teachers (14.3%). Magnet teachers are significantly more likely to choose to teach in a school on the basis of the theme or philosophy of the school, as well as the instructional program offered to students. Non-magnet teachers, on the other hand, are significantly more likely to indicate a choice based on a desire to teach with the teachers in the particular school selected.

The most important reasons cited by magnet school teachers are the theme or philosophy of the school (ranked first by 32.1% of teachers) and the instructional program in the schools (ranked first by 17.7%). For non-magnet school teachers, the most important reasons are that they want to teach with the school's teachers (ranked first by 13.4%) and that they were unhappy with their former school (ranked first by 12%). Interestingly, there are no differences in the percentage of magnet and non-magnet school teachers who choose the school due to the reputation of the students.

Teacher Workplace

Restructuring involves a redefinition of roles and relationships in schools and a redistribution of power. The underlying assumption of restructuring as a reform strategy is that changing the roles of teachers will lead to enhanced schooling for all children (Elmore, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Wehlage, Smith, & Lip-

man, 1992). Models of teacher professionalism suggest that teachers should be granted increased autonomy, shared opportunities for planning, and more collaboration with other teachers.

There are some interesting differences in the reports of magnet teachers and non-magnet teachers in Cincinnati about the nature of their workplace. Magnet school teachers report they have more resources than do non-magnet school teachers, such as instructional materials, access to professional support staff, and adequate library resources. There is no significant difference between teachers in magnet and non-magnet schools in terms of the number of hours a day they teach with an aide. On average, all teachers have an aide 1.7 hours a day.

There is a statistically significant difference in the class sizes of teachers in magnet and non-magnet schools. On average, magnet school teachers report 34.6 students in their class (SD=6.7), while non-magnet school teachers report 22.4 students per class (SD=5.9). There is a very large difference, however, in the total number of students teachers teach during the year. Magnet school teachers report teaching statistically significantly more students, 114 (SD=172) on average, compared with non-magnet school teachers, who teach 69 (SD=117). There are probably two reasons for this. First, the greater flexibility and innovation in the magnet curriculum probably allows students to take advantage of the specialized expertise of more teachers on the faculty, compared to the more traditionally structured non-magnet schools. Second, the sample of nine magnet schools in this study contains two K-8 schools, in contrast to the non-magnet sample, containing nine K-5 schools. Instruction in the middle school grades is typically departmentalized, resulting in a higher number of students taught per teacher.

Based on information provided by principals, there is a significant difference in the amount of planning time available to fifth-grade teachers. Magnet principals report fifth-grade teachers have, on average, 58 minutes of planning time each day (excluding lunch break), while non-magnet principals report that their teachers have only 33 minutes, on average. There are no differences between magnet and non-magnet schools, however, in the way planning time is structured for fifth-grade teachers (for example, staggered, common time by grade, common time by subject). In the current climate of school reform, common meeting times for teachers is hailed as extremely important.

St. Louis

School Enrollment Stability

Parents in St. Louis magnet schools report, on average, that their fifth-grade child has been attending the present school for 3.5 years (SD=1.8), whereas integrated non-magnet parents report on average that their fifth grader has been attending the school for 2.9 years (SD=1.9)and non-integrated school parents report their fifth-grade child has been attending the same school for 3.7 years —a statistically significant difference.

It is important to investigate further the issues of student mobility and enrollment stability in terms of race and income level. The difference that we found between magnet, integrated non-magnet, and non-integrated non-magnet schools holds across all income levels and racial groups, except for medium-high-income groups. Specifically, even for low-income families (household income less than $15,000), magnet schools have greater stability in their student enrollment (3.4 years) than integrated non-magnet schools (2.6 years) and only slightly more than non-integrated non-magnet schools (3.3 years). This is also the case across all racial groups—the enrollment of both white and African American students in magnet schools is slightly more stable than the integrated non-magnet schools and slightly less than the non-integrated non-magnet schools.

Even if we control for the number of years families have lived in the city and exclude those who have not lived in St. Louis for five years or more, this relationship holds. That is, student enrollment in magnet schools is more stable than that in integrated non-magnet schools and slightly less stable than in non-integrated non-magnet schools. Of course, magnet schools have the advantage of being

city-wide schools; that is, even if parents move, their children are able to continue in the same school, since placement in these schools presently is not constrained by neighborhood assignment.

In order to assess stability further, we also asked parents about the other schools their child may have attended. As presented in Table B12 (Appendix B), magnet school parents are significantly more likely than integrated non-magnet school parents to indicate that the present school is the only school their child has ever attended. Non-integrated non-magnet school parents are the most likely to report the present school is the only school their child has attended.

Across schools, minority magnet and non-integrated non-magnet parents are the most likely to indicate that the present school is the only school their child has attended (Appendix B, Table B13). Of whites in magnet schools, 31.6% indicate their child has not attended another school, compared with 35% of minority parents. In integrated non-magnet schools, whites are significantly more likely to report that their child has not attended another school (27.8%), compared with minority parents (18.9%). Of parents in the non-integrated non-magnet schools, 34.2% indicate their child has not attended another school. Only at lower incomes are magnet parents more likely to indicate the magnet school is the only school their fifth-grade child has attended since first grade.

Curriculum and Instruction

According to principals' reports, all the integrated non-magnet instruction provided to fifth graders in the sample was in self-contained classrooms. Eighty percent of the instruction in both magnet and non-integrated non-magnet schools was in self-contained classrooms, with the remaining 20% in each case in semi-departmental instruction.

Principals were asked to indicate whether the school employs a full-time librarian, art teacher, and music teacher, rather than sharing these teacher resources with other schools. All the integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools employ full-time music teachers and full-time art teachers, while only a third of the magnet schools have full-time music teachers and full-time art teachers. All the magnet schools have full-time librarians while none of the integrated or non-integrated non-magnets have full-time librarians.

We also found differences in the extent to which magnet and non-magnet schools offer various school-sponsored extracurricular activities to students, such as sports, instrumental music/band, chorus, dance, theater, visual arts, clubs, and field trips. Magnet schools are less likely to offer sports programs and more likely to offer programs such as band or theater. However, it seems the St. Louis schools make an effort to "spread the wealth" across the different types of school so that no one dominates in all areas. For example, 40% of the magnet and non-integrated non-magnet schools offer chorus programs, while 80% of the integrated non-magnets provide chorus. In dance, 40% of the magnet and integrated non-magnets have offerings, while 80% of the non-integrated non-magnet schools provide dance. Magnet schools, however, are far more likely to provide transportation for extracurricular activities (60% compared with 20% for integrated non-magnets and 25% for non-integrated non-magnets). Finally, while 20% of all three types of schools offer after-care, 40% of magnet schools provide preschool, and 60% of integrated non-magnets and 80% of non-integrated non-magnet schools do so. All magnet and integrated non-magnet schools offer special education classes, while only 80% of non-integrated non-magnets do so.

We found some significant differences in the ways in which teachers in magnet schools and non-magnet schools work. On average, teachers in integrated non-magnet schools are more likely to report that they team teach more hours during a typical day (magnet schools mean=2.1, SD=2.1; integrated non-magnet schools mean=2.9, SD=2.4; non-integrated 1.9, SD=2.3).

On average, magnet and non-integrated school teachers report somewhat more flexibility in their curriculum than do integrated non-magnet teachers. Magnet teachers are more likely to strongly agree with such statements as, "Instructional time at this school is flexible," and "Most teachers at this

school vary instructional strategies to meet their students' learning styles."

Integrated non-magnet teachers report more students in their classes have Individual Education Plans to meet special needs than either magnet or non-integrated non-magnet school teachers (mean=8.5, SD=11.8, versus 5.2, SD=9.0 and 5.5, SD=8.2 respectively). There are smaller differences in the average number of instructional hours during the school day that students with special needs are taught outside the classroom; for magnet school teachers the average is 3.4 hours, for integrated non-magnet teachers the average is 3.9 hours and for non-integrated non-magnet teachers the average is 2.7 hours. In addition, there are differences in the number of students who leave the classroom for gifted education programs: 2.9 for magnet school teachers, 1.1 for integrated non-magnet school teachers, and 0.8 for non-integrated non-magnet school teachers. There is no significant difference, however, between magnet and either type of non-magnet school in terms of the number of students who leave the classroom for remedial programs in reading, language arts, or mathematics.

There are no significant differences between magnet teachers and non-magnet teachers in the strategies they use for instruction, (for example, whole class lecture, grouping, peer tutoring, seatwork). The only exception is that non-magnet schools of both types are more likely to report using written seatwork for the whole class than magnet schools: 12.8% and 17.1%, respectively, for non-magnets versus 7.1% for magnet school teachers.

Teacher Backgrounds

As in Cincinnati, there are no significant differences by school type in the percentage of St. Louis teachers who are regular full-time, certified teachers. On average, 93.9% of all teachers are full-time, and 93.2% have regular certifications. There are, however, significant differences in the average educational levels of teachers in magnet and both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools. Magnet school teachers are more likely to have credits beyond the master's degrees and other graduate degrees than are either integrated or non-integrated non-magnet school teachers. There are also significant differences in the ethnic background of magnet, integrated non-magnet, and non-integrated non-magnet school teachers. Magnet schools have more minority teachers than do integrated non-magnet schools (53.3% compared with 49.3%) but significantly less than non-integrated non-magnet schools (70.6%).

Teachers (as well as students) tend to be most stable in the non-integrated non-magnet schools. Twenty-eight percent of teachers in the non-integrated non-magnets have 11 years or more tenure in their present school, versus 3.4% for magnet teachers. None of the integrated non-magnet teachers have 11 years or more tenure in their present schools. The bulk (51.2%) of integrated non-magnet teachers have one year or less in their present school, while the majority (52.9%) of magnet teachers have two years or less in their present schools.

We asked teachers why they chose a position at their present school. Both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet teachers are nearly three times as likely to indicate that they had no choice (74.3% and 71.1%, respectively), compared with magnet teachers (27.5%). Magnet teachers are significantly more likely to choose to teach in a school on the basis of the theme or philosophy of the school, as well as the instructional program offered to students (30.7% compared with 3.3% and 3.1% for integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools, respectively).

The most important reasons cited by magnet school teachers are the theme or philosophy of the school (ranked first by 30.7% of teachers) and the instructional program in the schools (ranked first by 14.3%). For both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet school teachers, "no choice" was the overwhelming reason they are teaching at their present school. Six percent stated they were unhappy at their former school. And, like Cincinnati, virtually no teachers in any school chose the school because of the reputation of the students.

Teacher Workplace

Magnet school and non-integrated school teachers report they have more resources than do inte-

grated non-magnet school teachers, such as textbooks, up-to-date textbooks, clerical help, instructional materials, and access to professional support staff. Magnet teachers and both types of non-magnet teachers report some interesting differences in the nature of their workplace. Teachers in magnet schools are somewhat more likely to teach with an aide than both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools: 2.6 hours compared to 2.0 and 1.2 hours, respectively.

There are only small differences in the class sizes of teachers in magnet and both integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools. On average, magnet school teachers report 17.8 students in their class (SD=6.8), while integrated non-magnet school teachers report 20.5 students per class (SD=8.7) and non-integrated non-magnet school teachers report 17.5 students per class (SD=5.9). There is a very large difference, however, in the total number of students teachers teach during the year. Magnet school teachers report teaching statistically significantly more students, 74 (SD=109.5) on average, when compared with integrated non-magnet school teachers, who teach 53.2 (SD=100.8), and non-integrated non-magnet school teachers, who teach 66.3 students (SD=110.9).

Two reasons probably account for this. First, the greater flexibility and innovation in the magnet curriculum may allow students to take advantage of the specialized expertise of more teachers on the faculty, compared to the more traditionally structured integrated and non-integrated non-magnet schools. Second, instruction in all the integrated non-magnet schools in the sample is self-contained, while 20% of the instruction in the magnet and non-integrated non-magnet schools is semi-departmentalized, resulting in a higher number of students taught per teacher.

Based on information provided by principals, there is a significant difference in the amount of planning time available to fifth-grade teachers. Magnet principals report that fifth-grade teachers have, on average, 97 minutes of planning time each day (excluding lunch break), and non-integrated non-magnet school teachers have 91 minutes, while integrated non-magnet principals report that their teachers have only 49 minutes, on average. None of the three types of schools share common planning time by subject, that is, where teachers get together to discuss how subjects should be taught. In areas such as staggered planning time and common planning time by grade, the three types of schools showed differences. In the current climate of school reform, common meeting times for teachers to work together on curriculum and individual student programs is considered extremely important. All the non-integrated non-magnet schools in our sample provide it, compared with only 40% of the magnet schools and 60% of the integrated non-magnets.

Conclusion

In both Cincinnati and St. Louis, it is clear magnet schools are attracting students of a higher socio-economic class and better-educated teachers. The magnet schools have greater resources and higher satisfaction levels for teachers. This difference is especially pronounced when the magnet schools are compared to the integrated non-magnet schools.

As for the communal opportunities to learn, our findings are not encouraging overall. Parental involvement, while greater among parents of magnet and non-integrated non-magnet schools, is still at very low levels. Because many studies have concluded that parental involvement is critical to improvement of school performance, greater efforts need to be made to bring parents into the life of the school and encourage them to take the lessons of the day into the homes at night.

This study suggests that while racial balance has largely been achieved through an array of choice arrangements in St. Louis and Cincinnati, the schools are stratified by income, education, and family status. The effects of this type of segregation may ultimately be as damaging to the future of public education as racial segregation was. Therefore, any plan for public education that includes choice, especially in the context of magnet schools, should carefully guard against this type of bias.

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Table A1: Sample Frame Construction Cincinnati School District	
Schools in INITIAL sample frame	56
Schools excluded because 4th/5th grade not in actual attendance	0
Receiving schools excluded	0
Schools excluded due to programmatic change affecting enrollment	2
Schools in ADJUSTED sample frame	54

Table A2: Public Schools (Number of Schools in Each Category)

School Type	Sample Frame	Initial Sample (prior to contacting principals)	Final Sample
Magnet	32		
School-within-school*	(8)		
Mixed	(5)		
Mixed school-within-school*	(4)		
Full	(15)	10	10
Non-magnet	22	10	10
Total	54	20	20

*School-within-school

Table A3: Survey Response Table

Survey Type	Number Disseminated	Number Returned	Response Rate
Parent	1,183	736	62.1%
Teacher	628	417	67.6%

Table A4: Parent Annual Total Household Income (all parents), by School Type. [(Number), Row percent, Column percent]

Income	Magnet	Non-Magnet	Row Total
Low (<$15,000)	(88) 36.1 24.9	(156) 63.9 43.7	(244) 34.4
Medium ($15,000-24,999)	(63) 45.7 17.8	(75) 54.3 21.0	(138) 19.4
Medium-high ($25,000-49,999)	(82) 56.9 23.2	(62) 43.1 17.4	(144) 20.3
High (>$50,000)	(120) 65.2 34.0	(64) 34.8 17.9	(184) 25.9
Column Total	(353) 49.7	(357) 50.3	(710) 100.0

Table A5: Information Used by Magnet School Parents [(Number), Percent Respondents Indicating Use of Each Source]

Source of Information	Number	Percent
Talks with Friends	(189)	66.1
Visit to Schools	(146)	51.0
Talks with Teachers	(127)	44.4
Fifth-grade Child	(116)	40.6
Achievement Test Scores	(98)	34.3
Other Child's Experience	(95)	33.2
Other Family Members	(65)	22.7
Informational Meetings	(55)	19.2
Information Center	(33)	11.5
School Newsletter	(31)	10.8
Radio, TV, Newspaper	(12)	4.2

Table A6: Information Used by Magnet Parents, by Income (Percentage of All Parents Responding)

Source of Information	Low (<$15,000)	Medium ($15,000- 24,999)	Medium-high ($25,000-49,999)	High (>$50,000)	Total
Talks with Teachers*	32.1	28.3	43.8	45.0	38.7
Talks with Friends*	46.4	51.7	66.3	60.0	56.7
Fifth Grade Child	31.0	35.0	36.3	39.2	35.8
Other Child's Experience	22.6	23.3	31.3	37.5	29.9
Other Family Members	19.0	16.7	26.3	16.7	19.5
School Newsletter	13.1	8.3	6.3	8.3	9.0
Informational Meetings	15.5	6.7	16.3	21.7	16.3
Radio, TV, Newspaper	4.8	0.0	3.8	4.2	3.5
Visit To Schools*	27.4	26.7	51.3	60.8	44.5
Informational Center	8.3	5.0	13.8	10.8	9.9
Achievement Test Scores*	19.0	18.3	31.3	40.8	29.4

*p<.05

Table A7: Magnet Parents' Reasons for Choice—Cincinnati

Reason for Choice	Number	Percent
Academic Reputation	(206)	72.0
Teaching Style	(185)	64.7
Transportation	(145)	50.7
Teachers	(117)	40.9
Near Home	(93)	32.5
Racial/Ethnic Mix	(122)	44.4
School Shares Values	(122)	42.7
Parent Involvement	(113)	39.5
Discipline	(108)	37.8
Safety	(89)	31.1
Another Child at School	(100)	35.0
Principal	(94)	32.9
Individual Help	(83)	29.0
Special Programs	(92)	32.2
Like the Neighborhood	(55)	19.2
Near Child Care	(2)	0.7
Child's Friends	(40)	14.0
Smaller Class Size	(62)	14.7
Special Needs Services	(23)	8.0
Near Job	(23)	8.0
Before/After Care	(4)	1.4

Table A8: Teacher Perceptions of Parents' Reasons for Choice by School Type
[(Number), Percent Teachers in Each School Type Indicating Reason]

Reason for Choice	Magnet	Non-magnet	Total	Reason for Choice	Magnet	Non-magnet	Total
No Choice/Zone*	(14) 6.1	(144) 84.7	(158) 39.5	Individual Help*	(82) 35.7	(18) 10.6	(100) 25.0
Near Home*	(68) 29.6	(104) 61.2	(172) 43.0	Safety*	(72) 31.3	(33) 19.4	(105) 26.3
Academic Reputation*	(160) 69.6	(41) 24.1	(201) 50.3	Principal*	(61) 26.5	(29) 17.1	(90) 22.5
Teaching Style*	(158) 68.7	(47) 27.6	(205) 51.3	Smaller Class Size*	(35) 15.2	(15) 8.8	(50) 12.5
Opportunities for Parental Involvement*	(82) 35.7	(48) 25.3	(125) 31.3	Before/After Care	(42) 18.3	(38) 22.4	(80) 20.0
Child's Friends	(50) 21.7	(40) 24.7	(92) 23.0	Discipline*	(90) 39.1	(40) 23.5	(130) 32.5
Teachers*	(119) 51.7	(56) 32.4	(175) 43.8	Near Job	(14) 6.1	(14) 8.2	(28) 7.0
School Shares Values*	(89) 38.7	(39) 22.9	(128) 32.0	Like the Neighborhood*	(24) 10.4	(47) 27.6	(71) 17.8
Transportation*	(140) 60.9	(75) 44.1	(215) 53.8	Near Child Care*	(8) 3.5	(25) 14.7	(33) 8.3
Like Racial and Ethnic Mix*	(129) 56.1	(28) 16.5	(157) 39.3	Special Needs Services	(36) 15.7	(27) 13.9	(63) 15.8
Special Programs	(135) 58.7	(15) 8.8	(150) 37.5	Another Child at School*	(165) 71.7	(92) 54.1	(257) 64.3

*p<.05

Table A9: Parents' Reasons for Choosing This School for Their Fifth Grade Child by Income (Percentage of All Parents Responding)

Reason for Choice	Low (<$15,000)	Medium ($15,000-24,999)	Medium-high ($25,000-49,999)	High (>$50,000)	Total
Near Home	37.3	42.0	39.4	36.2	38.3
Academic Reputation*	50.0	55.7	67.3	63.8	59.2
Teaching Style	47.0	53.4	55.8	57.7	53.5
Parent Involvement	32.1	25.0	37.5	37.6	33.7
Child's Friends	14.2	11.4	21.2	12.8	14.7
Teachers	41.8	34.1	36.5	43.0	39.6
Near Job	4.5	11.4	6.7	6.7	6.9
School Shares Values*	31.3	23.9	35.6	43.0	34.5
Individual Help*	35.8	27.3	18.3	22.1	26.1
Like the Neighborhood	23.9	27.3	19.2	18.8	21.9
Special Programs	25.4	23.9	27.9	24.2	25.3
Racial/Ethnic Mix	33.6	28.4	34.6	44.3	36.2
Near Child Care	1.5	0	2.9	2.0	1.7
Transportation*	51.5	45.5	33.7	44.3	44.2
Safety	37.3	34.1	27.9	23.5	30.3
Principal	31.3	22.7	22.1	36.2	29.3
Smaller Class Sizes	17.2	15.9	12.5	13.4	14.7
Special Needs*	14.9	13.6	3.8	5.4	9.3
Before/After Care	4.5	4.5	5.8	2.0	4.0
Discipline	37.3	34.1	24.0	30.9	31.8
Another Child at School	33.1	29.5	33.7	30.9	31.9

*p<.05

Table A10: Parents' Indicating This is the Only School Their Child Has Attended [(Number); Column percent]

Response	Magnet	Non-magnet	Total
Yes	(250) 71.0	(134) 42.4	(384) 57.5
No	(102) 29.0	(182) 57.6	(284) 42.5
Total	(352) 52.7	(316) 47.3	(668) 100.0

Table A11: Parents Indicating This Is the Only School Their Child Has Attended, by School Type and Ethnicity [(Number); Column percent]

Response	Magnet		Non-magnet (p< .01)		Total	
	White	Minority	White	Minority	White	Minority
Yes	(129) 75.0	(114) 67.9	(81) 50.6	(62) 34.3	(210) 63.3	(176) 50.4
No	(43) 25.0	(54) 32.1	(79) 47.4	(119) 65.7	(122) 36.7	(173) 49.6
Total	(172) 50.6	(168) 49.4	(160) 46.9	(181) 53.1	(322) 100.0	(349) 100.0

Table A12: Parents Indicating This Is the Only School Their Child Has Attended, by Income and School Type (M=Magnet; NM=Non-magnet) [(Number); Column percent]

Response	Low (<$15,000)		Medium ($15,000-24,999)		Medium-high ($25,000-49,999)		High (>$50,000)		Row Total	
	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM
Yes	(58) 65.9	(61) 39.1	(40) 63.5	(28) 37.8	(62) 75.6	(29) 46.8	(90) 75.6	(29) 46.0	(250) 71.0	(147) 41.4
No	(30) 34.1	(95) 60.9	(23) 36.5	(46) 62.2	(20) 24.4	(33) 53.2	(29) 24.4	(34) 54.0	(102) 29.0	(208) 58.6
Total	(88) 25.0	(156) 43.9	(63) 17.9	(74) 20.8	(82) 23.3	(62) 17.5	(119) 33.8	(63) 17.7	(352) 100.0	(355) 100.0

Table B1: Sample Frame Construction by School District

	St. Louis	Parkway	Rockwood	Total Suburban
Schools in INITIAL sample frame	66	18	16	34
Schools Excluded because 4th/5th grade not in actual attendance	5	0	0	0
Receiving schools excluded	4	0	0	0
Schools excluded due to programatic change affecting enrollment	0	0	0	0
Schools in ADJUSTED sample frame	57	18	16	34

Table B2: St. Louis Public Schools (Number of Schools in Each Category)

School Type	Sample Frame	Initial Sample (prior to contacting principals	Final Sample
Magnet	10	10	10
Integrated non-magnet	36	10	8
Non-integrated non-magnet	11	8	8
Total St. Louis	57	28	26
Total Suburban	34	6	6

Table B3: Survey Response Table

Survey Type	Number Disseminated	Number Returned	Response Rate
St. Louis City			
Parent	1,414	953	67.4
Teacher	783	553	70.6
Suburb			
Parent	725	513	70.8
Teacher	292	162	55.5

Table B4: Parent Annual Total Household Income (all parents), by School Type
[(Number), Row percent, Column percent]

Income	Magnet	Integrated Non-magnet	Non-integrated Non-magnet	Row Total
Low (<$15,000)	(139) 32.2 16.2	(156) 67.5 18.2	(121) 62.7 14.1	(416) 48.6
Medium ($15,000-24,999)	(104) 24.1 12.1	(48) 20.8 5.6	(42) 21.8 4.9	(194) 22.7
Medium-high ($25,000-49,999)	(137) 31.7 16.0	(24) 10.4 2.8	(19) 9.8 2.2	(180) 21.0
High (>$50,000)	(52) 12.0 6.1	(3) 1.3 .4	11 5.7 1.3	(66) 7.7
Column Total	(432) 50.2	231 27.0	(193) 22.5	(856) 100.0

Chi-Square (Pearson) = 120.9 (p<0.001)

Table B5: Information Used by Magnet School Parents
[(Number), Percent Respondents Indicating Use of Each Source]

Source of Information	Number	Percent
Fifth-grade Child	(237)	49.5
Talks with Friends	(208)	43.4
Talks with Teachers	(201)	42.0
Visit to Schools	(182)	38.0
School Newsletter	(146)	30.5
Information Center	(113)	23.6
Other Child's Experience	(98)	20.5
Other Family Members	(82)	17.1
Achievement Test Scores	(79)	16.5
Informational Meetings	(61)	12.7
Radio, TV, Newspaper	(50)	10.4

Table B6: Information Used by Magnet Parents, by Income (Percentage of All Parents Responding)

Source of Information	Low <$15,000	Medium ($15,000-24,999)	Medium-high ($25,000-49,999)	High (>$50,000)	Total
Talks with Teachers*	35.3	33.0	51.1	53.8	42.0
Talks with Friends	38.1	36.9	51.9	48.1	43.4
Fifth Grade Child*	42.4	40.8	58.5	63.5	49.7
Other Child's Experience	18.0	19.4	20.7	25.0	20.0
Other Family Members	18.7	16.5	14.1	17.3	16.6
School Newsletter	33.1	33.0	31.9	23.1	31.5
Informational Meetings	10.1	11.7	17.0	17.3	13.5
Radio, TV, Newspaper	7.2	8.7	14.8	13.5	10.7
Visit To Schools*	31.7	31.1	42.2	57.7	38.0
Informational Center	19.4	24.3	23.7	30.8	23.3
Achievement Test Scores*	15.1	9.7	20.7	25.0	16.8

*p<.05

Table B7: Magnet Parents' Reasons for Choice

Reason for Choice	Number	Percent
Academic Reputation	297	62.0
Teaching Style	258	53.9
Transportation	204	42.6
Teachers	160	33.1
Near Home	89	18.6
Racial/Ethnic Mix	174	36.3
School Shares Values	152	31.7
Parent Involvement	111	23.2
Discipline	148	30.9
Safety	137	28.6
Another Child at School	90	18.8
Principal	110	23.0
Individual Help	192	39.8
Special Programs	234	48.9
Like the Neighborhood	93	19.4
Near Child Care	5	1.0
Child's Friends	47	9.8
Smaller Class Size	134	28.0
Special Needs Services	104	21.7
Near Job	22	4.6
Before/After Care	2	0.4

Table B8: Teacher Perceptions of Parents' Reasons for Choice, by School Type (Percent)				
Reason for Choice	**Magnet**	**Integrated Non-magnet**	**Non-integrated Non-magnet**	**Total**
No Choice*	1.4	83.2	74.2	49.2
Near Home*	10.7	57.8	76.9	46.0
Academic Reputation*	71.0	18.0	38.5	45.1
Teaching Style*	68.7	14.9	32.4	41.3
Opportunities for Parent Involvement*	40.7	21.7	41.2	35.4
Child's Friends*	13.1	13.0	23.6	16.5
Teachers*	58.9	23.0	51.1	46.0
School Shares Values*	44.4	18.6	35.7	34.1
Transportation*	66.8	42.2	26.4	46.5
Racial/Ethnic Mix*	67.3	15.5	4.4	31.8
Special Programs*	61.3	5.6	15.9	30.3
Individual Help*	41.1	14.9	26.4	28.7
Safety*	35.5	15.5	27.5	27.1
Principal*	33.2	17.4	37.4	30.0
Smaller Class Size*	32.2	6.2	18.7	20.3
Before/After Care*	2.3	5.0	24.7	10.4
Discipline*	42.5	13.7	27.5	29.3
Near Job	3.3	5.6	7.1	5.2
Like the Neighborhood	18.2	18.0	13.7	16.7
Near Child Care*	0.9	5.6	13.7	6.5
Special Needs Services	20.1	23.6	24.2	22.4
Another Child at School*	74.8	37.9	55.5	57.8

*$p<0.05$

Table B9: Parents' Reasons for Choosing This School for Their Fifth Grade Child by Income
(Percentage of All Parents Responding)

Reason for Choice	Low (<$15,000)	Medium ($15,000-24,999)	Medium-high ($25,000-49,000)	High (>$50,000)	Total
Near Home*	37.7	31.4	19.2	24.2	31.4
Academic Reputation*	26.1	42.0	55.2	74.2	39.4
Teaching Style*	31.0	36.7	57.6	46.8	39.0
Parent Involvement	21.3	19.7	22.1	22.6	21.2
Child's Friends	11.9	8.0	8.1	14.5	10.4
Teachers*	26.6	27.8	33.1	43.5	29.5
Near Job	3.0	3.2	6.4	3.2	3.8
School Shares Values	25.1	23.9	28.5	24.2	25.5
Individual Help*	25.1	31.4	41.3	24.2	29.8
Like the Neighborhood	16.4	13.3	19.2	14.5	16.1
Special Programs	25.3	27.1	41.3	53.2	31.2
Racial/Ethnic Mix*	18.4	17.0	30.8	48.4	22.9
Near Child Care	0.7	2.1	2.9	1.6	1.6
Transportation*	23.1	26.6	39.5	33.9	28.1
Safety	27.0	17.6	26.7	22.6	24.5
Principal	20.3	20.2	22.7	27.4	21.3
Smaller Class Sizes*	11.9	19.7	29.7	19.4	17.9
Special Needs	12.7	18.1	19.2	19.4	15.8
Before/After Care	1.5	1.1	1.7	3.2	1.6
Discipline	24.1	22.9	26.2	27.4	24.5
Another Child at School	18.9	14.9	18.0	24.2	18.2

*$p<0.05$

Table B10: Suburban and Minority Parents' Most Important Sources of Information

Source of Information	Suburban Parents	Minority Magnet
Talks with Teachers	(3) 8.6	(52) 25.6
Talks with Friends	(6) 17.1	(25) 12.3
Fifth-grade Child	(8) 22.9	(34) 16.7
Other Child's Experience	(1) 2.9	(11) 5.4
Other Family Members	(3) 8.6	(3) 1.5
School Newsletter	(3) 8.6	(23) 11.3
Informational Meetings	(0) 0.0	(5) 2.5
Radio, TV, Newspaper	(1) 2.9	(1) 0.5
Visit to Schools	(4) 11.4	(14) 6.9
Information Center	(3) 8.6	(12) 5.9
Acheivement Test Scores	(3) 8.6	(23) 11.3

Chi-Square (Pearson)=15.67 (p=0.11)

Table B11: Suburban and Minority Parents' Reasons for Choice [(Number); Column percent]

Reason for Choice	Suburban Parents	Minority Magnet
Near Home	(0) 0.0	(13) 6.0
Academic Reputation	(12) 33.3	(89) 41.4
Teaching Style	(7) 19.4	(22) 10.2
Opportunities for Parental Involvement	(0) 0.0	(1) 0.5
Child's Friends	(0) 0.0	(1) 0.5
Teachers	(1) 2.8	(4) 1.9
Near Job	(0) 0.0	(1) 0.5
School Shares Values	(0) 0.0	(6) 2.8
Individual Help	(3) 8.3	(16) 7.4
Like the Neighborhood	(1) 2.8	(1) 0.5
Special Programs	(0) 0.0	(25) 11.6
Racial/Ethnic Mix	(2) 5.6	(5) 2.3
Near Child Care	(0) 0.0	(1) 0.5
Transportation	(3) 8.3	(4) 1.9
Safety	(4) 11.1	(2) 0.9
Principal	(0) 0.0	(5) 2.3
Smaller Class Size	(1) 2.8	(3) 1.4
Special Needs Services	(1) 2.8	(3) 1.4
Discipline	(1) 2.8	(7) 3.3
Another Child at School	(0) 0.0	(6) 2.8

Chi-Square (Pearson)=34.8 (p=0.05)

Table B12: Parents' Indicating This Is the Only School Their Child Has Attended [(Number); Column percent]

Response	Magnet	Integrated Non-magnet	Non-integrated Non-magnet	Total
Yes	(157)	(53)	(70)	(280)
	32.6	21.0	33.0	29.6
No	(324)	(199)	(142)	(665)
	67.4	79.0	67.0	70.4
Total	(481)	(252)	(212)	(945)
Row Percent	50.9	26.7	22.4	100.0

Chi-Square (Pearson)=12.2 (p>0.01)

Table B13: Parents' Indicating This Is the Only School Their Child Has Attended by School Type and Ethnicity [(Number); Column percent]

Response	Magnet		Integrated Non-magnet		Non-integrated Non-magnet*
	White	Minority	White	Minority	
Yes	(60)	(91)	(22)	(30)	(69)
	31.6	35.0	27.8	18.9	34.2
No	(130)	(169)	(57)	(129)	(133)
	68.4	65.0	72.2	81.1	65.8
Total	(190)	(260)	(79)	(159)	(202)
	42.2	57.8	33.2	66.8	100.0

*All minority students, excluding the small number of white students in the non-integrated, non-magnet schools.

Figure C1: Family Structure: Percent of Two-parent Families

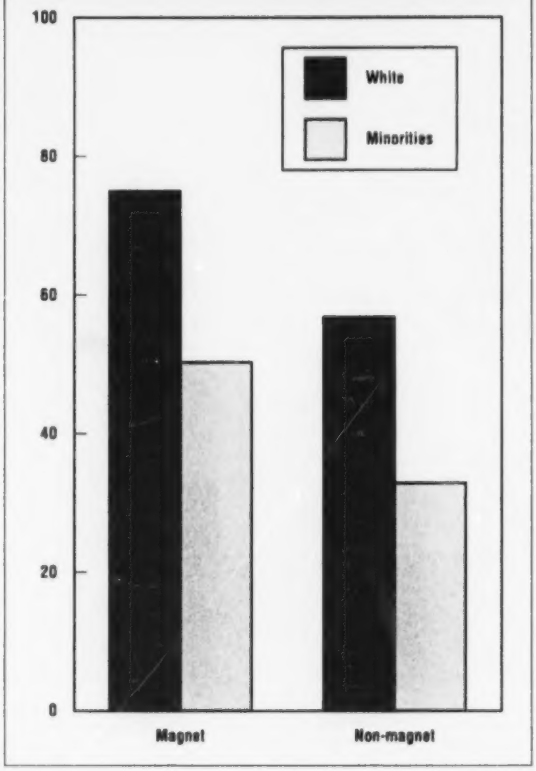

Figure C2: Parent Education: Percent of Families with at Least One Parent Who Has a College Degree

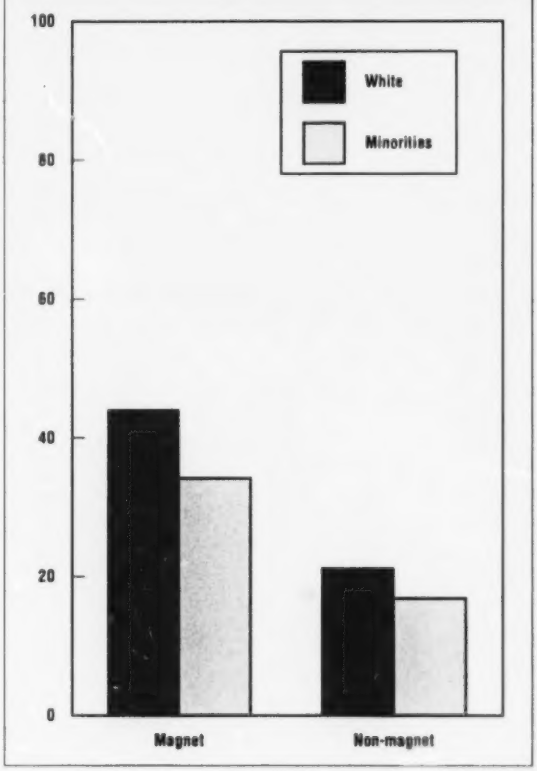

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Figure C3: Parent Unemployment: Percent of Families with Both Parents Unemployed

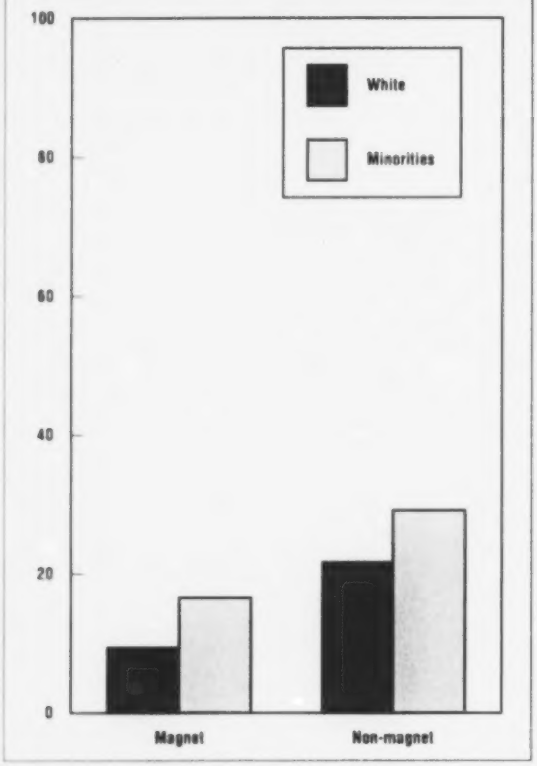


Figure C4: Family Income: Percent of Families with Annual Income Below $15,000

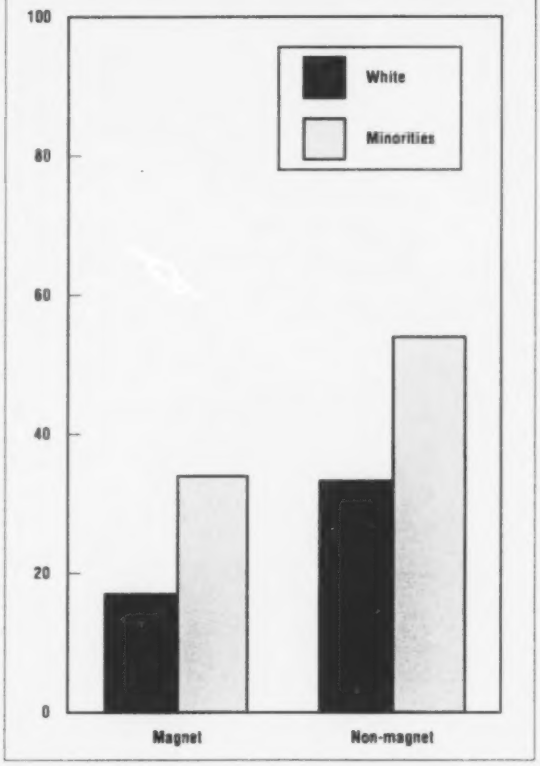


Figure D1: Family Structure: Percent of Two-parent Families

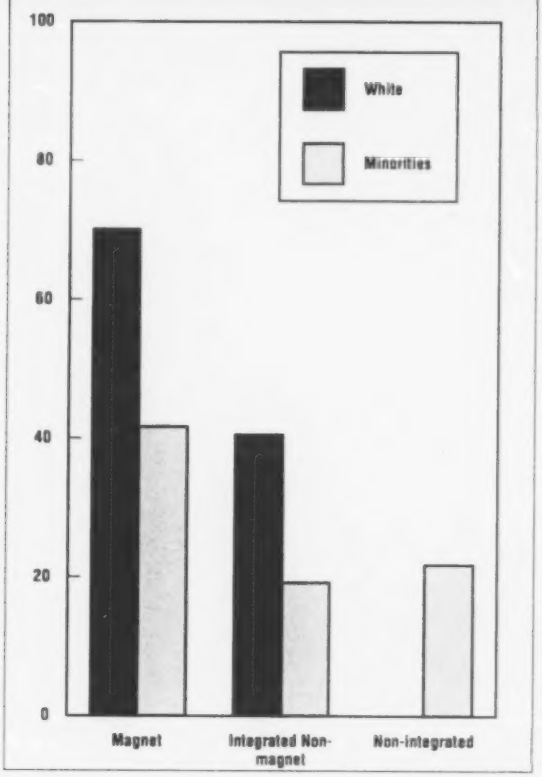


Figure D2: Parent Education: Percent of Families with at Least One Parent Who Has a College Degree

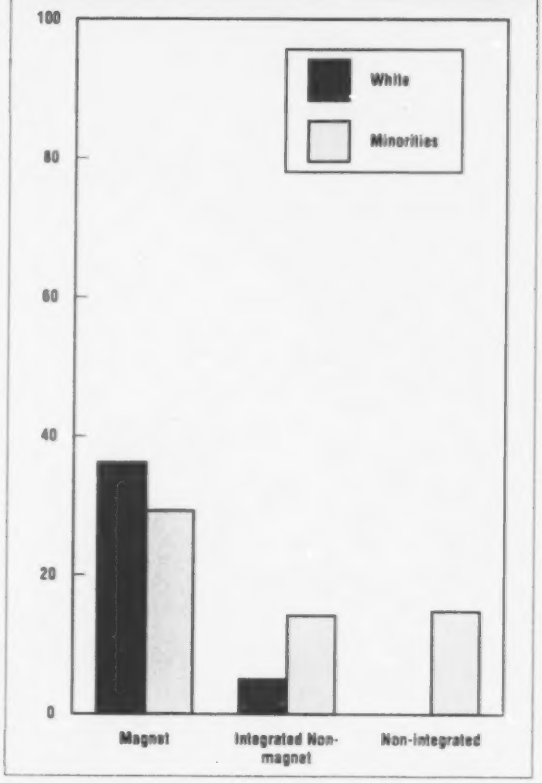


Figure D3: Parent Unemployment: Percent of Families with Both Parents Unemployed

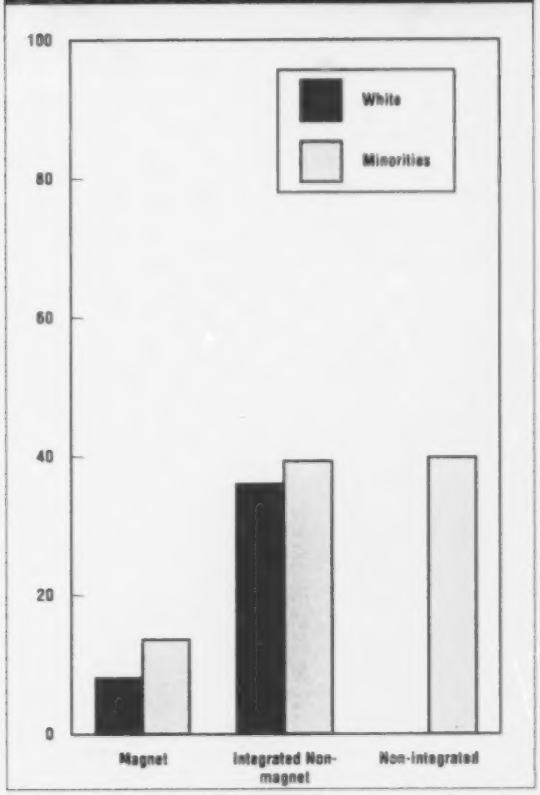
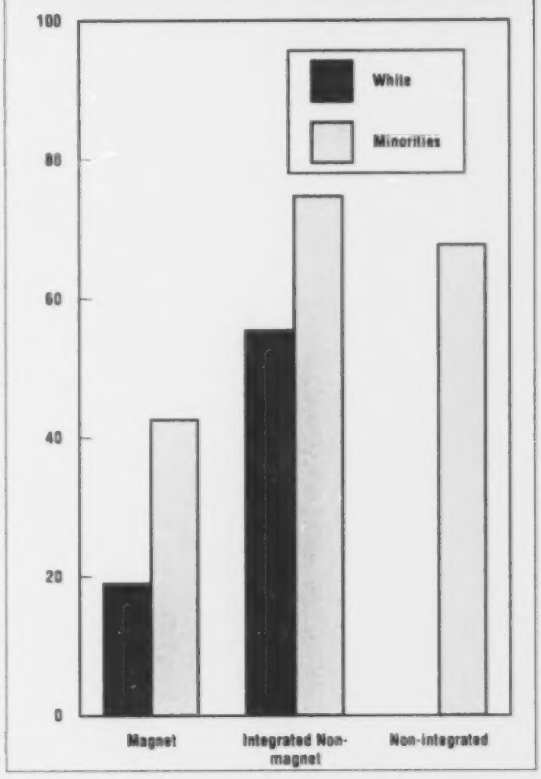


Figure D4: Family Income: Percent of Families with Annual Income Below $15,000



Communal Opportunities to Learn

To study communal opportunities to learn in magnet and zone schools, discriminant analysis was conducted. Discriminant analysis is a multivariate procedure which distinguishes between groups of respondents based on a series of discriminating variables. The goal of the analysis is to find a linear combination of variables that maximizes the differences between groups in the sample to determine which communal opportunities to learn best distinguish between the types of schools: magnet and zone.

All measures were constructed in a similar manner. First we selected items that conceptually capture the constructs. Then we analyzed the inter-item correlations and the Cronbach reliability of each subscale, making adjustments when necessary. Communal opportunities to learn focus on six areas of home-school relationships: (1) amount of school information to parents, (2) amount of parent influence on school policies, (3) level of parental involvement at school, (4) frequency of teacher communication with parents, (5) amount of parent-parent interactions outside of school, and (6) the extent to which the school has a caring, supportive school climate that welcomes parents.

School information to parents is measured by parent reports of how often they receive information about the school from a variety of sources (6 items, alpha=0.78).

Parent influence measures the extent to which parents indicate they have influence in certain areas of school policy, such as setting school goals, grading policies, and the school budget (10 items, alpha=0.91).

Parent involvement is operationalized as involvement in seven areas (for example, volunteering, attending meetings) (alpha=0.79).

School climate measures the extent to which parents sense the school has a caring, supportive atmosphere that is welcoming to them (9 items, alpha=0.82).

Parent-parent interactions determines the extent to which parents meet outside of school, such as in church and at sports activities (6 items, alpha=0.81).

Teacher communication with parents measures the frequency of teacher communication with the home (5 items, alpha=0.91).

In addition, the analyses control for two variables that could account for differences between magnet and zone schools: (a) income level of the parents and (b) ethnicity. The means and standard deviations of all the variables aggregated to the school level are presented in Table E2 in this appendix (Appendix E).

Table E1: Definition of the Variables in the Discriminant Analysis

Variable	Measures	Cincinnati Mean (SD)	St. Louis Mean (SD)
Parent Background Characteristics			
Income	9 point-scale from <$7,500 (1) to >$100,000 (9)	39.0* (38.2)	21.7* (21.3)
Ethnicity	Black and other minorities=1; White=0	0.512 (0.500)	0.696 (0.460)
Communal Opportunities to Learn			
Parental Involvement	4-point scale from never (1) to often (4) 7 items, alpha=0.79	2.28 (0.733)	2.39 (0.630)
Parental Influence	from none (1) to a great deal (4) 10 items, alpha=0.91	2.17 (0.723)	2.05 (0.735)
Parent-Parent Interaction	from never (1) to often (4) 6 items, alpha=0.81	1.74 (0.635)	1.59 (0.583)
Amount of School Information to Parents	from never (1) to often (4) 6 items, alpha=0.78	2.44 (0.562)	2.32 (0.564)
Teacher Communication with Parents	from never (1) to many times (4) 5 items, alpha=0.91	2.36 (0.904)	2.44 (0.938)
School Climate	from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) 9 items, alpha=0.82	3.04 (0.565)	3.07 (0.464)

* thousand of dollars, estimated from midpoints of relevant intervals

Table E2: Mean and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of the Variables According to Choice Arrangement

	Cincinnati		St. Louis		
Variables	**Magnet (N=353)**	**Non-magnet (N=361)**	**Magnet (N=483)**	**Integrated Zone (N=256)**	**Non-integrated Zone (N=214)**
Parent Background Characteristics					
Income (thousands of dollars)	46.2 (39.3)	31.9 (35.7)	27.6 (21.1)	13.1 (12.0)	18.7 (25.9)
Ethnicity	0.49 (0.501)	0.53 (0.500)	0.578 (0.495)	0.668 (0.472)	0.990 (0.099)
Communal Opportunities to Learn					
Parental Involvement	2.46 (0.698)	2.10 (0.725)	2.46 (0.598)	2.23 (0.643)	2.41 (0.656)
Parental Influence	2.24 (0.707)	2.10 (0.731)	2.04 (0.676)	1.99 (0.769)	2.13 (0.812)
Parent-Parent Interactions	1.78 (0.665)	1.69 (0.601)	1.50 (0.532)	1.62 (0.606)	1.80 (0.621)
Amount of School Information to Parents	2.54 (0.556)	2.34 (0.549)	2.32 (0.526)	2.31 (0.612)	2.36 (0.599)
Teacher Communication with Parents	2.42 (0.903)	2.31 (0.903)	2.31 (0.924)	2.75 (0.951)	2.75 (0.884)
School Climate	3.19 (0.488)	2.88 (0.598)	3.15 (0.409)	2.97 (0.519)	3.01 0.485

Parental Choice: Consequences for Families, Students, and Schools

Technical Summary Report: Nashville

Ellen Goldring and Claire Smrekar
Vanderbilt University—October 1995

The claims made regarding the effects of parental choice on school improvement are both ambitious and controversial. Proponents of public school choice maintain it promotes racial balance voluntarily rather than by court-ordered busing of children to distant schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods. They maintain it promotes academic excellence by making individual schools more focused on quality to attract students. Finally, choice is seen as a way to counteract income effects on educational opportunity, where wealthier families are able to buy or rent homes in neighborhoods with desirable schools.

In particular, magnet schools, the focus of this study, are being introduced in more and more school systems in an attempt to improve scholastic standards, to promote diversity in race and income, and to provide a range of programs to satisfy individual talents and interests.

However, empirical evidence on the effects of public school choice remains relatively scant. Virtually all this research relies on secondary analyses of data sets with critically important data missing, case studies of particular schools that cannot speak to school-systemwide effects, comparisons of public and private schools, or official reports that deal with only some of the philosophical and design issues that are important to the development of policy and practice across school systems.

As the debate over the use of choice to improve schools intensifies and the need to rely on magnet schools to achieve desegregation increases, two significant demographic trends complicate matters further. First, the nation's schools are becoming increasingly diverse, racially and ethnically. Second, the proportion of the nation's children who live in poverty is increasing. These two developments make it more important to estimate the consequences of parental choice on school enrollment patterns. These trends highlight the urgent need to ensure that increasing parental choice does not further disadvantage children who need high-quality education the most.

This project looks at the systemic use of magnet schools as examples of choice within public school districts. We are aware, of course, that the lessons of publicly regulated and managed parental choice plans cannot be generalized to choice plans that include private schools. Our analysis, however, sheds light on some of the assumptions underlying free market approaches to choice because we have collected information on what kinds of parents choose magnet schools and the reasons they do so, as well as information on the characteristics of parents whose children are assigned to neighborhood or zoned schools, without choice.

This study examines various dynamics and outcomes of efforts to increase parental choice among public schools. The major questions addressed are:

1. What is the context of decision-making for parents in a system of school choice?
   (a) Who chooses magnet schools? Does the enrollment of children in alternative choice schools typically sort students along socioeconomic lines and/or by race and ethnicity?
   (b) How are choices made? What sources of information do parents use when making choices?
   (c) Why do parents make they choices they do? What are parents' reasons for choosing a particular school?

89

2. What is the impact of district choice programs on the access to communal opportunities for learning for all children, and particularly low-income and minority children? Does the interaction between parents and schools differ across social class, race, and ethnicity in magnet and non-magnet schools, and is this interaction influenced by the social class, race, and ethnicity of parents and schools?
3. Are there differences between magnet and non-magnet school conditions?

District Overview

The Metropolitan Nashville (Tennessee) school district was chosen because (1) it is a district that has both well-established academic magnets and newly implemented specialized magnet programs, (2) it operates an extensive busing program that has made the city's schools among the most racially balanced of big city school systems, and (3) it was accessible to the researchers. The system has an enrollment of approximately 68,000 students, of whom 58% are white, 39% are African-American, and 3% are other minorities. The district operates 119 schools, including 66 elementary schools, 35 middle schools, 13 high schools, and 5 special schools. The Metropolitan Public Schools began implementing magnet schools as one of the mandated educational components to improve the quality of programs provided to students following a 1983 court order.

Sample Selection Methodology for Nashville

During the summer of 1993, the central office of the Nashville Metropolitan School District provided a directory of all public schools in the district for the 1992-93 school year. A sample frame was constructed for the district, composed of all magnet schools and those non-magnet schools matching the magnets on grade structure and racial composition, with emphasis placed on percent African American. The goal was to develop a sample frame consisting of magnets and non-magnets in a one-to-one match on these variables.

Nashville has three well-developed academic magnet schools established in the early and mid 1980s: Meigs (grades 5–8), Martin Luther King (grades 7–12), and Hume-Fogg (grades 9–12). Admission to each of the three academically selective magnets is based on test scores and grade point averages. In order to meet desegregation goals, students are selected for a lottery from two pools: one for African American students and another for white students. More than 300 white students are currently on a waiting list for the 3 schools. The resulting racial balance in all three schools is just over 30% African American. Nashville's total enrollment (based on second month attendance) in 1993-94 was 71,294, of which 55.9% (39,825) were white and 39.9% (28,415) were African American.

During the 1993-94 school year, four additional specialty magnet programs were established, including a Paideia program at Buena Vista (grades 5–7), arts magnets at Pearl-Cohn High School and Wharton Elementary, and a literature magnet at East Middle School. Due to the small number of magnet schools in Nashville, all of these magnets were included in the study.

Magnet schools in Nashville are contrasted with two comparison groups: non-magnet zone schools and non-magnet students in the same schools as the school-within-school magnet programs. Each magnet school was matched with a non-magnet school based on grade structure and racial composition. Emphasis was placed on matching the percent of African Americans enrolled in the grades of interest. In addition, non-magnet students in the schools-within-schools were selected to match the numbers of magnet students in the same school in the sample. Assuming a class is about 30 students, whole classes of non-magnet students were randomly chosen to match the numbers of magnet students. Individual students were not selected.

Data collection in Nashville focused on the entering grades in each of the existing magnet schools (fifth, seventh, ninth). This increased the comparability for all the magnet schools, the new ones and the established academic magnets. Appendix F presents a summary of the sample frame.

Procedures and Measures

An anonymous questionnaire was distributed to all fifth-, seventh-, and ninth-grade parents in the magnet programs and non-magnet zone schools, and to a sample of non-magnet parents in the school-within-school settings. Questionnaires were also distributed to all non-administrative certified staff in each school in the sample. Members of the research team visited each school and delivered questionnaires to a designated school contact person, who then distributed the parent questionnaires to the students through their fifth-, seventh-, and ninth-grade homeroom teachers. Teacher questionnaires were distributed either in their school mailboxes or during a faculty meeting.

The students were instructed to have their parents return the questionnaires in sealed envelopes to the school for subsequent pickup by the designated school contact person. Students were told that if 85% of their class returned the questionnaires, they would each receive a coupon from McDonald's fast-food restaurant. Teachers returned their questionnaires in sealed envelopes directly to their school contact person. Members of the research team returned periodically to collect the returned questionnaires.

Schools having a low response rate were targeted for follow-up, and a second round of visits and calls to the school was initiated. Attention was given in the follow-up procedures to ensure that the racial balance of the parents responding to the questionnaires equaled the racial balance of the school.

The response rates in Nashville were 53% for the parent questionnaires and 78% for the teacher questionnaires (see Appendix F).

Results

Part 1: Context of Decision-making

Discussion of a system of choice in education requires an understanding of the context in which those decisions take place. A thorough understanding of the context further informs the various perspectives of both opponents and proponents of school choice plans.

Most research on parents' reasons for school choice has been limited to private schools (for example, Bauch, 1987; Bauch & Small, 1986; Erickson, 1982; 1984; 1986; Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Greeley, McCready, & McCourt, 1976; Kraushaar, 1972). Bauch and Small (1986) developed a typology listing four dimensions of parents' reasons for school choice. These reasons are listed as follows: (1) academic and curricular reasons, (2) discipline, (3) religion and values, and (4) other considerations (for example, location of the school, transportation availability, child's choice).

Magnet schools, as a form of public school choice, allow parents to make decisions based on judgments about their children's education in a public school context (Metz, 1986). In a report on the Massachusetts controlled choice plan, Glenn (1993) suggests that parents provided a variety of reasons for selecting schools. In addition to concerns related to convenience and proximity to their homes, parents also cited attendance at a school by a sibling. These reasons, Glenn points out, were combined with educational quality issues, including school staff and climate.

In this section, three questions will be addressed relative to the context of public school choice for parents of fifth-, seventh-, and ninth-grade students in Nashville based on information obtained from our sample of parents and teachers: (A) Who is choosing magnet/alternative schools?

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1. Several extenuating circumstances may explain the relatively low parent response rates. First, because several of these magnet programs were new in the 1993-94 school year, researchers went into the field later in the year, when parents and students are less likely to be responsive. Secondly, a tragic fatal shooting of a middle-school student occurred just days before the questionnaires were distributed. Principals told researchers that all school-parent communications during the week following the shooting were related to safety. The response rate at one school was so low it was dropped from the data analysis.

(B) What sources of information are parents using to make their decisions? (C) Why are parents making the choices they make? These questions were asked of parents at magnet schools and magnet programs, zone schools, and schools-within-schools.

(A) Enrollment in Magnet and Non-magnet Programs

Debates about magnet school programs often focus on issues of self-selection and the so-called "creaming effect." Opponents of magnet schools claim that children who study in magnet schools are of higher social class and more motivated than those who do not choose magnet schools. Answering this question is central to our research: Are children in magnet schools sorted along socio-economic lines and/or by race? This section provides a portrait of the racial and socio-economic composition of magnet and non-magnet schools in Nashville.

Racial Balance

In the 1993-94 school year, the Nashville Metropolitan Public Schools enrolled 71,294 students. Of this total enrollment, 55.9% were white and 39.9% were African American. The school-within-school magnet schools in that year had racial balances as follows: Buena-Vista, 58% white and 37.6% African American; East magnet program 39.8% white, 55.5% African American; and Wharton magnet program, 44.1% white and 54.2% African American. Pearl-Cohn's overall racial composition was 30% white and 69.5% African American (the education department did not keep magnet program racial statistics for that year). For the dedicated magnets, in the 1993-94 school year, the percent African American was as follows: Hume-Fogg, 30.8%; M.L. King, 32.0%; and Meigs, 32.7%.

Socio-economic Status

The following sections examine the socio-economic characteristics of families choosing magnet schools versus parents accepting mandatory assignment. Various indicators of socio-economic status examined in this study suggest parents in magnet schools are of a significantly higher social class than are their counterparts in non-magnet schools. This is the case across all racial groups.

Income

Both dedicated and school-within-school magnet school parents have significantly higher income levels than parents in non-magnet programs (Appendix G, Figure G1). Nearly 88% of the dedicated magnet school parents have household incomes above $25,000, compared with 44% of parents in non-magnet schools. In the school-within-school magnets, 73.7% of the magnet parents have household incomes above $25,000, compared with 50% of the non-magnet parents. Only 3.6% of dedicated magnet school parents have annual incomes below $15,000, compared with 16.1% of parents in non-magnet schools. In the school-within-school situations, 5.6% of the parents of magnet program students have incomes below $15,000, compared with 29.6% of the parents in the non-magnet programs.

The income differential between dedicated magnet and non-magnet families is consistent for all racial groups, although the differences are much more pronounced for minority parents. Nearly 90% of white parents of dedicated magnet school students have incomes above $25,000 a year, compared with 85.8% in non-magnets. Only 1.4% of white parents in dedicated magnet schools have incomes below $15,000, compared with 5.8% in non-magnet schools.

As indicated, the income disparity between magnet and non-magnet families is much more pronounced for minority parents. Eighty-four percent of minority parents in dedicated magnet schools have incomes above $25,000 a year, compared with 44.1% in non-magnet schools. Only 16% have incomes below $15,000, compared with 40.2% in non-magnet schools.

The pattern of disparity also holds for both white and minority parents in school-within-school magnet programs. Seventy-seven percent of white parents and 73% of minority parents in school-within-school magnet programs have incomes above $25,000 a year.

92

By contrast, only 52.7% of the white parents and 42.5% of minority parents in the non-magnet portion of the school-within-school programs have incomes above $25,000. None of the white families in the school-within-school magnet programs have incomes below $15,000 and only 11.5% of minority families are in that income range. In the non-magnet portion of the school-within-schools, 22.8% of white families and 41.3% of minority families have incomes below $15,000.

Family Structure

Students from magnet schools are more likely to come from two-parent families. Seventy-six percent of parents in the dedicated magnet schools are married, compared with 61.3% of the non-magnet school parents. In the school-within-school programs, 68.3% of the magnet program parents are married, compared with 54.7% of the non-magnet program parents. In addition, 2.5% of the dedicated magnet school parents are single parents, having never been married, compared with 6.7% of the non-magnet school parents. In the school-within-school programs, 9.6% of the magnet program parents are unmarried, compared with 13.2% of the non-magnet program parents (Appendix G, Figure G2).

Educational Level

Parents in magnet schools, across all racial groups, are more likely to have higher educational levels than their counterparts in non-magnet schools (Appendix G, Figure G3). For example, in Nashville's dedicated magnet schools, 69.7% of parents are college graduates or have advanced degrees, compared with 54.3% in non-magnet schools. In schools-within-schools, 58.8% of magnet parents have college or advanced degrees, compared with 13.2% of the non-magnet program parents. Only 1% percent of dedicated magnet school parents have not graduated from high school, compared with 5.6% of non-magnet school parents. Of school-within-school magnet parents, 2.2% have not graduated high school, compared with 16.9% of school-within-school non-magnet parents.

This trend is similar for both minority and white parents. Sixty-six percent of all dedicated magnet school minority parents who responded are college graduates or hold advanced degrees, compared with 30.5% of non-magnet school minority parents. In schools-within-schools, 55.8% of minority magnet parents have college or advanced degrees, compared with 22.5% of non-magnet school-within-school program parents.

Among white parents the trend is the same. In dedicated magnet schools, 73.7% of white parents have college or advanced degrees and none lack a high school degree. Of white parents in non-magnet schools, 62% have college or advanced degrees and 2.4% have no high school degree. Among white parents in schools-within-schools, 61.7% of magnet program parents have college or advanced degrees and 14.9% lack high school degrees. For non-magnet program parents, 25% have college or advanced degrees and 19.2% lack high school degrees.

Employment Status

Parents in magnet schools are more likely to be employed than are parents in non-magnet schools (Appendix G, Figure G4). In dedicated magnet schools, no parents indicated that they are unemployed (either full- or part-time), compared with 8.2% of the non-magnet school parents. In schools-within-schools, 1.9% of magnet program parents reported neither parent is employed, compared with 13.2% of the non-magnet program parents. Among minority parents in dedicated magnets, no families reported total unemployment, while 21% of the minority parents in non-magnet schools reported that both parents are unemployed. In schools-within-schools, only 3.9% of magnet program minority families reported both parents are unemployed, compared with 14.9% of the non-magnet program minority parents. Among white families, no magnet parents, either dedicated or school-within-school, reported both parents are unemployed, compared with 2.7% of the non-magnet school families and 12.5% of the school-within-school non-magnet parents.

It is clear that magnet schools enroll students whose parents are of higher socio-economic status with regard to employment, educational level, family structure, and income. These differences are

93

consistent for all racial groups and for both dedicated and school-within-school magnet programs.

(B) Sources of Information

Parents have access to and use various sources of information as they begin the process of choosing a school. In this section we ask: (1) What types of information do parents use when making a choice? (2) Do different racial groups use different types of information? (3) How satisfied are the parents with the information available to them?

Magnet school parents use a variety of sources of information to learn about their public school alternatives to neighborhood assignment. As Appendix F, Table F1 indicates, the most frequently used source of information for parents of dedicated magnet school students is discussions with their child (82%), followed by discussions with teachers (68.7%), and visits to schools (55.3%). Other sources of information used by parents include achievement test scores (52.0%) and talking to friends (40.4%). Among the least utilized sources of information for these parents were institutional sources such as radio, TV, and newspapers (13.7%), and information centers (3.0%).

Parents of school-within-school magnet programs, however, utilize a somewhat different set of information sources. For these parents, the most frequently used source of information is discussions with teachers (54.2%), followed by visits to schools (50%), informational meetings (41.7%) and radio, television, and newspapers (40.6%). Part of the reason for this heavier reliance on institutional sources of information may be that the school-within-school programs were new the year of the study and information dissemination and parental selection would have been more dependent on institutional sources rather than purely social networks.

We investigated whether the use of various sources of information differs according to race (Appendix F, Table F2). Among dedicated and school-within-school magnet parents, white parents are more likely than minority parents to use information obtained in discussions with their child, their friends, and teachers. White parents are also more likely than minority parents to use information obtained from visits to schools, informational meetings, and media sources (radio, television, and newspapers). Minority parents are more likely to consult school newsletters and to consider achievement test scores. When the most important sources of information are compared for white and minority parents in magnet schools, no significant differences emerge.

We also explored whether there are social class differences in the frequency of use of sources of information. Only a few significant differences emerged. The higher the income of parents of dedicated magnet school students, the more likely they are to use discussions with friends and informational meetings as sources of information. No statistically significant differences emerged for parents of school-within-school magnet students based on income.

In summary, in Nashville there are few differences in the types and importance of information used by different racial groups or among social classes. However, certain types of information seem to be more useful to magnet school parents than others. Dedicated magnet school parents seem to rely heavily on their own personal resources, such as friends, family, and their children. They also explore specific schools by talking to teachers, visiting schools, and checking achievement test scores. Dedicated magnet school parents do not seem to utilize organized information from the school district, such as newsletters, information centers, and meetings, as well as radio and TV advertisements. These findings underscore the central role and function of parents' social networks for gathering information within the context of school choice decision-making. These networks may lead to stable and predictable sources of information regarding school climate, curriculum, and application deadlines. However, as this and other studies indicate (for example, Cochran, 1990; Cochran & Brassard, 1979; Lareau, 1989), the relative importance of social networks is directly related to social class. That is, the development and utilization of parents' primary social networks are linked to issues of neighborhood stability and isolation, access to

transportation and civic-community organization, and occupations which promote workplace associations (Cochran, 1990; Lareau, 1989). As a consequence of the relationship between social class structure and social networks, the pool of resources from which low-income parents can draw to make decisions regarding school choice programs may be somewhat smaller than the one available to middle-class parents (Smrekar, in press).

For the newer school-within-school magnet programs, parents seem to be forced to rely more heavily on institutional sources of information, such as the media and informational meetings held by the schools. While few income-related differences emerged, white parents seem to be more inclined than minority parents to discuss these choices with their child and their friends. White parents are also more likely than minority parents to use information from the media and to visit schools.

(C) Parents' Reasons for Choice

We asked parents to identify the issues that are important to them in selecting a school for their child, using a list of 21 possible reasons for choice (Appendix F, Table F3). For dedicated magnet school parents, the overwhelming reason for choice is the academic reputation of the school (99.3%), with virtually no differences between white and minority parents. Special programs (73.3%) and teaching style (65.7%) are the next most frequently cited reasons for parents who choose dedicated magnets.

For the newer school-within-school programs, the reasons for choice are much more diffuse. Special programs is the most frequently cited reason for choice (68.8%), followed by teaching style (62.5%), but about one third of the parents also cite academic reputation (30.5%) and parental involvement (29.2%).

We also asked the teachers in each school to indicate their perceptions of the reasons that parents choose their particular school, using the same list of 21 possible reasons plus "no choice/zone." Dedicated magnet teachers report that parents choose the school because of the strong academic reputation (76.6%) and special programs (72.3%) (Appendix F, Table F4). Teachers in the school-within-school programs, however, are much less in agreement on why parents choose the magnet programs. Even teachers who teach only magnet students cited "no choice" most often as a reason for choice. Interestingly, teachers who taught both magnet and non-magnet students in school-within-school programs are more likely to cite teaching style (82.1%) above "no-choice" (53.6%).

To what extent are differences in parents' reasons for choice related to race? In dedicated magnet schools, race influences few of the most important reasons for choice. Both white and minority parents are equally likely to choose these magnet schools because of academic reputation and teaching style (100% compared with 98%, and 68.2% compared with 62.0%, respectively) or because the school offers special programs (73.3% and 72.0%) or shares the same values (42.1% compared with 44.0%). However, some of the less important reasons for choice show racial distinctions. White parents are more likely than minority parents to choose a dedicated magnet school because of the availability of individual help (35.9% compared with 25%) or because they like the teachers (47.2% compared with 21%). Minority parents, on the other hand, are more likely than white parents to choose a magnet school because of the racial/ethnic mix (40% compared with 22.6%), opportunities for parental involvement (22% compared with 14.4%), and safety (17% compared with 7.7%).

Some racial differences also are evident for parents of students in school-within-school magnet programs. Minority parents are more likely to choose a program because of its special programs (72.1% compared with 66%), academic reputation (46.5% compared with 14%), shared values (32.6% compared with 16%), teaching style (69.8% compared with 58%), opportunities for parental involvement (34.9% compared with 24%), smaller class sizes (32.6% compared with 14%), or because it is near home (25.6% compared with 14%). White parents are more likely than minority parents to make the choice based on the teachers (26% compared with 20.9%), availability of before- and after-school care

(12% compared with 4.7%), or their child's friends (14% compared with 2.3%).

Transportation

During the period of this research (the 1995-96 academic year), Nashville did not offer transportation to parents of magnet school students. Even so, very few dedicated magnet parents (4.4%) say transportation is an issue for them. On the other hand, 14.6% of the school-within-school magnet program parents say there are schools they did not consider because of the lack of transportation. Non-magnet parents are significantly more likely to say lack of transportation affected their school choice. Twenty-seven percent of non-magnet parents and 40.5% of school-within-school non-magnet parents report that there are schools they did not consider because of lack of transportation.

Minority parents in dedicated magnets are somewhat more likely to indicate that transportation is an issue than white parents (9.1% compared with 2.1%). Of non-magnet school parents, 24.6% of white parents and 33.3% of minority parents report that transportation is a consideration in choosing a school. Additionally, lower income parents are more likely than higher income parents to be concerned about transportation. Specifically, 34.2% of the lower income choosers of all four types of schools indicate that they did not consider certain schools because of the unavailability of transportation, compared with 18.2% of medium-income parents, 16.1% of medium-high-income parents, and 10.3% of high-income parents.

Part 2: Communal Opportunities to Learn

The concept of "opportunity to learn" has evolved considerably in recent years. Researchers initially thought of learning opportunity in terms of a relatively narrow set of indicators of student exposure to subject area content, or "the opportunity to study the topics represented in the test" (Osafehinti, 1987). Early indicators used to assess learning opportunities include: the amount of time spent in school (defined in terms of the length of the school day or school year); the amount of coverage of a subject area, the sequence and pace of instruction, and the relative emphasis placed on various subjects or topics by teachers (assessed variously by amount of time or the number of lessons teachers devote to particular topics, or even by the number of pages in the textbook devoted to the areas tested); and actual student time-on-task (Bennett, 1987; Anderson, 1991).

Broader definitions of learning opportunity began to emerge in the late 1980s. These expanded conceptualizations were incorporated into the Goals 2000: Educate America Act enacted in 1994. The legislation calls on states to develop voluntarily their own customized set of "opportunity to learn standards" that will help them reach the eight national goals set forth in the act. States are asked to adopt standards that will allow them to "measure schools' capacity to deliver adequate services" (*Education Week*, September 21, 1994, p. 19) as well as address each of the following:

1. the quality of curriculum and instructional materials;
2. teachers' capability to effectively teach challenging standards to all students;
3. teachers' professional development, focused on helping all students reach challenging standards; and
4. the extent to which school curriculum and instructional strategies are aligned with challenging content standards (US Department of Education, 1993).

Absent from this discussion is the dimension of parental involvement that is beginning to be considered central to student learning. In theory, communal opportunities to learn are enhanced to the extent schools, families, and communities interrelate and support one another. The concept of learning opportunities expands by adding the dimension of parental involvement in schools. The expanded concept explicitly recognizes the critical role played by parents in building and enhancing the capacity of the school to produce student learning. Indicators of communal opportunities for learning thus should measure the extent to which a school encourages and facilitates the involvement of par-

ents. This is critical given that one of the newest national goals for education by the year 2000 is that "every school will promote partnership that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Based on the discussion presented earlier, we assume that communal opportunities to learn include: (1) school information provided to parents; (2) parental influence on school policies; (3) level of parent involvement at school; (4) teacher communication with parents; (5) parent-parent interactions outside of school, and (6) a caring, supportive school climate that welcomes parents.

There are relatively low levels of communal opportunities to learn in all Nashville schools (Appendix F, Table F5). Parents in all four types of schools report that they (1) are rarely involved in school activities; (2) have very little influence in school decision-making; (3) rarely have contact with other parents; and (4) receive very little information about the school from school personnel, their child, or other sources. While the next section describes some differences in the magnitude (for example, the levels of parental involvement) of communal opportunities to learn between dedicated magnet, non-magnet, and schools-within-schools, we should underscore the fact that in all schools in the sample, parents report little interaction with their children's schools and teachers.

Statistical analyses indicate that communal opportunities for parental involvement are different in dedicated magnet, non-magnet, school-within-school magnet, and school-within-school non-magnet programs. Controlling for differences in the income level of parents, dedicated magnet school parents are significantly more likely to say they sense a supportive, caring climate that welcomes parental involvement. This finding supports the idea that parents who choose a school often perceive they are a part of a school community with unity of purpose and social cohesion (Smrekar, 1993). It should be noted that these findings may be the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy among magnet school parents. This argument suggests that when an investment is associated with making a choice, whether it be time, energy, or other ancillary issues, parents tend to report higher levels of satisfaction. "It is generally assumed parents who invest in their child's education by actively making a choice will view their schools favorably. Even if there are no visible reasons for the choice to lead to satisfaction, many parents may justify their choice and investment by indicating satisfaction with the school and viewing it through 'rose colored glasses'" (Goldring & Shapira, 1994, p. 399).

Magnet school parents also report they have more influence over school policies than the parents in the three other types of programs and that they receive more information from the schools. However, parents in school-within-school magnet programs are the most likely to report that they feel involved with such activities as school meetings and fundraising events or volunteering for classroom and playground duties. Non-magnet school parents, on the other hand, report the highest levels of parent-parent interaction, and indicate that they interact with other parents at church, through carpooling, through community programs, or by living near each other.

On average, parents in dedicated magnet schools report receiving significantly more frequent communication about school issues than parents in each of the other two types of schools. Non-magnet parents receive the next highest amount of school-home communication followed by parents in the schools-within-schools. The order of response is the same when race is considered. In short, magnet school parents, both white and minority across low- and high-income levels, report receiving information about the school more frequently than parents in non-magnet schools; and school-within-school parents report receiving the least amount of information.

Furthermore, non-magnet school parents report more frequent communications with other parents than do dedicated and school-within-school parents, both magnet and non-magnet. This may be linked to the geographic community. When parents live in close proximity to one another, they have more opportunities to interact with each other on

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an ongoing, informal basis. These face-to-face interactions between parents provide crucial opportunities for informal networking and the sharing of information that can contribute to expanding the school community to include parents (Smrekar, in press). The results of our analysis of responses to teacher communication with parents were not statistically significant.

Barriers to Parental Involvement at School

Many parents cannot be involved in school activities because of special needs (such as transportation, child care, different meeting times). We asked parents whether they had special needs that prevented them from attending conferences with teachers or other meetings at school. In Nashville, the results of our survey show that dedicated magnet school parents have fewer special needs than parents in other types of schools, with few differences based on race.

There are some differences, however, in the special needs parents have, in all schools, based on income levels. Lower-income magnet school parents, both white and minority, in both dedicated and school-within-school magnet programs, are more likely to indicate a need for transportation (to and from school) and alternative meeting times than non-magnet school parents. No other significant differences emerged.

We asked teachers their perceptions of possible barriers to parental involvement. Dedicated magnet teachers are significantly more likely to indicate that distance and travel are sometimes or often barriers to parental involvement in school when compared with non-magnet teachers (76% compared with 53.4%).

Non-magnet teachers are more likely than dedicated magnet teachers to indicate parents' work schedules are "often" a barrier to parental involvement than non-magnet teachers (38.2% compared with16.7%). In addition, non-magnet teachers are significantly more likely to indicate parental apathy is "often" a barrier to parental involvement. Specifically, 42.9% of the non-magnet teachers, compared with only 13.2% of the dedicated magnet teachers, indicate that parental apathy often affects parental involvement in the school. There is little difference in the extent to which dedicated magnet and non-magnet teachers report that parents "do not feel welcome in the school."

Part 3: Magnet and Non-magnet School Conditions

Curriculum and Instruction

We asked principals of the schools in our sample to provide us with information on various aspects of the curricular and instructional programs available in each school to examine the ways in which instruction is organized. One-third of the dedicated magnet schools indicated that instruction is in self-contained classrooms, while two-thirds offer departmentalized instruction. None of the schools-within-schools provide instruction in self-contained classrooms; one-third offer departmentalized instruction, and two-thirds provide semi-departmentalized instruction. The non-magnet schools are 80% semi-departmentalized and 20% departmentalized, with no self-contained classroom instruction.

Dedicated magnet teachers are significantly more likely to report that the lessons (1) actively involve the learner (96.3% compared with 77.8% of non-magnet and 80.8% of school-within-school teachers), (2) promote inquiry (91.7% compared with 63.4% and 73.1%), and (3) vary strategies to meet student needs (86.4% compared with 76.9% and 79.8%).

We asked teachers to report on various aspects of the curriculum and instruction at their school. First, we found some significant differences in the ways in which teachers in dedicated magnets, non-magnets, and schools-within-schools work. Non-magnet teachers are more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement that the curriculum relies on textbooks (60.3% compared with 53.4% of dedicated magnet and 31.9% of school-within-school teachers) and short answers (42.2% compared with 26.1% and 31.9%). However, school-within-school and non-magnet teachers are equally likely to say their curriculum focuses on state requirements (76.7% and 74.8%, respectively, compared with 68.7% of dedicated magnet teachers) and preparing

for standardized tests (32.9% and 33.2%, respectively, compared with 22.3% of dedicated magnet teachers).

We also asked teachers how they allocate their teaching during a typical day to different instructional strategies, such as whole class lecture, grouping, peer tutoring, and seatwork. There are some significant differences between magnet teachers and non-magnet teachers in the strategies they use for instruction. Non-magnet teachers are more likely to report using written seatwork for the whole class more than 25% of the time (37.7% of non-magnet teachers indicate using seatwork compared with 18.8% of magnet teachers). Dedicated magnet school teachers are more likely to report that they group students without regard for ability more than 25% of the time (47.9% compared with 30.1%). There is little difference in the amount of time dedicated magnet and non-magnet teachers report spending in whole class lectures and discussions. In addition, magnet teachers are significantly more likely to report that they team teach more hours during a typical day (magnet schools mean=2.0, SD=2.9; non-magnet schools mean=1.1, SD=2.0; school-within-schools mean=1.6, SD=2.5).

Non-magnet and school-within-school teachers report that more students in their classes have Individual Education Plans to meet special needs than dedicated magnet teachers (mean=9.7, SD=15.95 and 7.6, SD=15.2, versus 3.4, SD=12.1). This must be the case because of the selective enrollment criteria of the dedicated magnet schools based on grade point averages and achievement test scores. Non-magnet teachers also report a greater average number of daily instructional hours during the school day that students with special needs are taught outside the classroom; for non-magnet teachers the average is 3.4 hours, for dedicated magnet school teachers the average is 1.3 hours and for school-within-school teachers the average is 1.9 hours. Non-magnet teachers also report more students leave the classroom for remedial programs in reading, language arts, or mathematics: 3.9 compared with 0.7 for dedicated magnet teachers and 1.2 for school-within-school teachers. There was no significant difference in the number of students leaving the classroom to attend programs for the gifted and talented.

We found few differences in favor of magnet schools in the extent to which magnet and non-magnet schools offer various extracurricular activities, such as sports, instructional music/band, chorus, dance, theater, visual arts, clubs, and field trips. For example, all three types of school offer band and field trip programs. Two-thirds of both dedicated magnet and non-magnet schools have sports programs, compared with 100% of the schools-within-schools. All the dedicated magnets have chorus programs, compared with 83.3% of the non-magnets, but all the non-magnets have dance and theater programs, compared with two-thirds of the dedicated and school-within-school magnets. Magnet schools are less likely to provide transportation for extracurricular activities (one-third of the dedicated and school-within-school magnets provide it compared with 59% of the non-magnets). Finally, none of the schools offer pre-school. One-third of the dedicated magnets and non-magnets offer after-school care, compared with half of the schools-within-schools. All the non-magnets and schools-within-schools offer special education classes, while only a third of the dedicated magnets do so. In summary, Nashville does not seem to have loaded up its magnet schools with extra programs at the expense of its non-magnet schools. Instead, it seems to have made an effort to "spread the wealth."

Differences for Teachers

One of the major criticisms of magnet schools is that the "creaming effect" also occurs with respect to district-wide faculty assignments; that is, not only do magnets attract the "best" students, they also attract the "best" teachers in the district.

Teacher Backgrounds

There are no significant differences by school type in the percent of teachers who are regular full-time, certified teachers. On average, 98.5% of dedicated magnet teachers and 97.3% of non-magnet teachers are full-time. Dedicated magnet school teachers are about as likely to have credits beyond

99

the master's degrees and other graduate degrees as non-magnet school teachers (45.2% and 43.9%, respectively). School-within-school teachers are the least likely to have credits beyond the master's, 32.6%. There are also no significant differences in the ethnic background of dedicated and school-within-school magnet and non-magnet teachers. In all three cases the staff is predominantly white and female.

There are, however, some significant differences in the length of time teachers have been teaching at their particular school. The average number of years tenure in their present school is 5.1 for dedicated magnet teachers, compared with 7.5 for non-magnet and 7.8 for school-within-school teachers. One-third of the teachers in non-magnet schools have 11 years or longer tenure in their present school, versus 14% of the dedicated magnet teachers. The majority (57.1%) of non-magnet school teachers have more than 7.5 years tenure at their present school compared with 46.2% of dedicated magnet teachers. This could reflect the fact that the dedicated magnets were created in the early to mid-1980s, while the non-magnets and schools-within-schools have existed for decades.

Principals were asked to indicate whether the school employs a full-time librarian, art teacher, and music teacher rather than sharing these teacher resources with other schools. All three types of schools employ full-time music teachers. Both the dedicated magnet and non-magnet schools have full-time art teachers. All the non-magnet and school-within-school magnet schools have full-time librarians while only half the dedicated magnets do.

We asked teachers why they chose a position at their present school. Both non-magnet and school-within-school teachers are nearly five times as likely to indicate that they had no choice (30.2% and 27.9%, respectively), compared with dedicated magnet teachers (6.1%). Both dedicated and school-within-school teachers are significantly more likely to choose to teach in a school on the basis of the theme or philosophy of the school (36.5% and 19.8%, compared with 3.5%). Dedicated magnet teachers are the most likely to say they choose to teach at their school because of the instructional program offered to students (28.7% compared with 8.7% for non-magnet and 3.5% for school-within-school teachers).

Teacher Workplace

Restructuring of school systems involves a redefinition of roles and relationships in schools and a redistribution of power. The underlying assumption of restructuring as a reform strategy is that changing the roles of teachers will lead to better education for all children (Elmore, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992). Models of teacher professionalism suggest that teachers should be granted increased autonomy, shared opportunities for planning, and more collaboration with other teachers.

Magnet and non-magnet teachers report interesting differences in the nature of their workplace. Dedicated magnet school teachers report they have more clerical help and access to information about students than non-magnet school teachers. However, few significant differences were reported between magnet and non-magnet teachers in quality of instructional materials, access to professional support staff, library resources, or teaching aides.

There is virtually no difference in the class sizes of teachers in dedicated magnet and non-magnet schools. On average, magnet school teachers report 23.8 students in their class (SD=5.6), while non-magnet school teachers report 23.5 students per class (SD=6.9). School-within-school class sizes are very slightly smaller at 22.2 per class (SD=9.6). There is a very large difference, however, in the total number of students teachers teach during the year. Dedicated magnet school teachers report teaching 145.6 students (SD=128.6) on average compared with non-magnet school teachers, who teach 112.9 (SD=74.95) and school-within-school teachers, who teach 126.4 (SD=169). The greater flexibility and innovation in the dedicated magnet curriculum may allow students to take advantage of the specialized expertise of more teachers on the faculty, compared to the more traditionally structured non-magnet schools.

Based on information provided by principals, there is no significant difference in the amount of

planning time available to teachers. Dedicated magnet principals report that teachers have, on average, 53.3 minutes of planning time each day (excluding lunch break), non-magnet school teachers have 45 minutes, and school-within-school teachers have 50 minutes. In the current climate of school reform, common meeting times for teachers is considered extremely important and all the schools-within-schools in our sample provided it, compared with only 50% of the dedicated magnet schools and 20% of the non-magnets. None of the three types of schools report common planning time by subject.

Student Attendance Patterns

In Nashville, both dedicated and school-within-school magnet program students are significantly less likely to have attended a public school, and more likely to have attended private and parochial school, before the present school. Of dedicated magnet school students, 65.8% attended another Nashville public school before the present school, compared with 72% of non-magnet students. For the school-within-school programs, 57.9% of the students attended another district public school before the present school, compared with 67% of the non-magnet school-within-school students. In addition, there is a significant difference in this breakdown by race. Of the white students in dedicated magnet schools, 65.4% have attended another public school compared with 77.4% of white non-magnet school students. In the school-within-school programs, 65.4% of white students attended another public school compared with 71.9% of non-magnet program students. Of minority students in school-within-school programs, the same pattern holds: 51.9% of the magnet students attended another Nashville public school compared with 60.4% of school-within-school non-magnet program students. Only for minority students in dedicated magnets was the reverse is true: 68.1% of dedicated magnet students have attended another public school in Nashville compared with 61.8% of non-magnet students.

Despite the disparity for minority students in dedicated magnets, this pattern could indicate that Nashville public schools have achieved some success in reversing the flight of socio-economically advantaged students to private and parochial schools, especially with its established academic magnet schools. For example, 7.9% of the students in dedicated magnets and 3.7% of school-within-school magnet students report they attended a non-denominational private school before the present school, compared with 2.9% of non-magnet and 0.9% of school-within-school non-magnet students. Ten percent of dedicated magnet students attended a parochial school, compared with 7.4% of non-magnet, 6.5% of school-within-school magnet, and 4.6% of school-within-school non-magnet students. Only at upper-income levels (above $50,000 a year) are the differences statistically significant for attending private schools before attending magnets. Of these upper-income families, 7.8% of the white and 8.5% of the minority dedicated magnet school students, attended a non-denominational private school.

Conclusion

In Metropolitan Nashville, it is clear that magnet schools are attracting students of a higher socio-economic class. The dedicated academic magnets, through a selective admissions policy based upon grade point average and standardized tests scores, are choosing the brightest students. In addition, teachers in these magnet schools seem to use flexible teaching strategies to challenge these students. Furthermore, the academic magnets may be attracting parents who might otherwise have sent their children to private schools. At the same time, Nashville does not seem to be assigning the most highly educated teachers to the magnet schools. The school system also seems to be making a conscious effort to spread its resources, such as librarians, art and music teachers, and special extracurricular activitites, among all types of schools.

As for parental involvement, our findings are not encouraging. Parental involvement is at very low levels across all types of schools. There are some indications, however, that parents feel more welcome and more involved in the magnet programs, while

parents in the non-magnet programs interact with other parents more frequently.

Finally, this study concludes that while racial balance has largely been achieved through both busing and the use of weighted pools for the academic magnets in Nashville, the magnet and non-magnet schools are still stratified by income, employment, and educational status. The effects of this kind of social class segregation ultimately can be as damaging as racial segregation to the future of public education. Therefore, any plan for public education that includes choice, especially in the context of magnet schools, should carefully guard against this type of bias.

102

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Table F1: Nashville Sample Frame			
School Type	**Number of Schools**	**Teacher Response Rate**	**Parent Response Rate**
Dedicated Magnets (Academically Selective)	3	93% (104/112)	64% (330/51)
School-within-School Magnet Programs	4	78% (130/167)	51% (100/197)
School-within-School Non-magnet Programs	4	78% (130/167)	39% (109/214)
Zone Schools	6*	72% (84/212)	52% (351/675)
Total	17	78% (416/531)	53% (803/1674)

*The original sample was seven. However, response rates for teachers and parents in one school were extremely low and it was dropped from the data analysis.

Table F2: Information used by Magnet School Parents — [(Number), Percent Respondents Indicating Use of Each Source]

Source of Information	Magnet	School-within-School Magnet
Discussions with Child	(246) 82.0	(70) 11.6
Talks with Teachers*	(206) 68.7	(52) 54.2
Visit to Schools	(166) 55.3	(48) 50.0
Achievement Test Scores*	(156) 52.0	(5) 5.2
Talks with Friends*	(243) 40.4	(49) 8.2
Informational Meetings*	(91) 30.3	(40) 41.7
Other Family Members	(60) 20.0	(22) 22.9
School Newsletter	(59) 19.7	(28) 29.2
Other Child's Experience*	(57) 19.0	(7) 7.3
Radio, TV, Newspaper*	(41) 13.7	(39) 40.6
Information Center	(9) 3.0	(4) 4.2

*$p < 0.05$

Table F3: Differences in Magnet Parents' Sources of Information by Race

Source of Information	Dedicated Magnet Parents		SWS Magnet Parents*	
	White	Minority	White	Minority
Talks with Teachers	74.4	59.0	58.0	53.5
Talks with Friends	85.6	73.0	56.0	46.5
Discussions with Child	85.6	76.0	84.0	62.8
Other Child's Experience	19.0	20.0	6.0	7.0
Other Family Members	20.0	21.0	26.0	18.6
School Newsletter	17.9	23.0	24.0	37.2
Informational Meetings	33.3	24.0	46.0	37.2
Radio, TV, Newspaper	16.4	7.0	52.0	30.2
Visit to Schools	62.1	41.0	54.0	46.5
Information Center	3.1	3.0	2.0	4.7
Achievement Test Scores	47.2	63.0	0.0	11.6

*School-within-school

Table F4: Magnet Parents' Reasons for Choice — [(Number). Percent Respondents Indicating Reason for Choice]

Reason for Choice	Dedicated Magnet Parents	School-within-School Magnet Parents
Academic Reputation*	(298) 99.3	(29) 30.2
Teaching Style	(197) 65.7	(60) 62.5
Transportation*	(16) 5.3	(11) 11.5
Teachers*	(114) 38.0	(23) 24.0
Near Home*	(12) 4.0	(19) 19.8
Racial/Ethnic Mix*	(86) 28.7	(13) 13.5
School Shares Values*	(127) 42.3	(22) 22.9
Parent Involvement*	(52) 17.3	(28) 29.2
Discipline*	(78) 26.0	(11) 11.5
Safety	(32) 10.7	(8) 8.3
Another Child at School	(23) 7.7	(7) 7.3
Principal	(72) 24.0	(14) 14.6
Individual Help	(98) 32.7	(25) 26.0
Special Programs	(220) 73.3	(66) 68.8
Like the Neighborhood	(6) 2.0	(3) 3.1
Near Child Care	(1) 0.3	(1) 1.0
Child's Friends	(16) 5.3	(8) 8.3
Smaller Class Size*	(42) 14.0	(22) 22.9
Special Needs Services	(16) 5.3	(6) 6.3
Near Job	(37) 12.3	(17) 17.7
Before/After Care*	(10) 3.3	(9) 9.4

*$p < 0.05$

Table F5: Teacher Perceptions of Parents' Reasons for Choice, by School Type [(Number), Percent Teachers in Each School Type Indicating Reason]

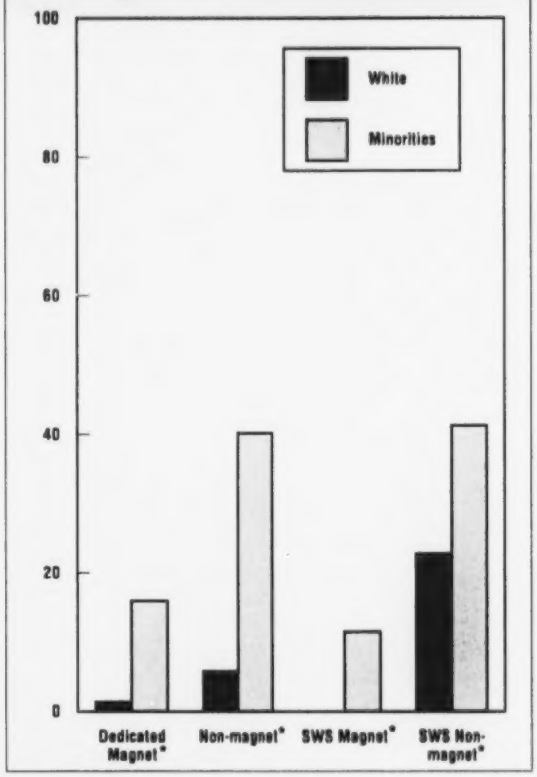
Reason for Choice	Dedicated Magnet	Non-magnet	SWS Magnet	SWS Both	Total
No Choice/Zone*	19.7	89.1	77.9	53.6	62.1
Near Home*	12.4	46.2	48.5	25.0	34.1
Academic Reputation*	76.6	41.8	1.5	10.7	44.6
Teaching Style	52.6	12.5	19.1	82.1	31.4
Opportunities for Parental Involvement*	31.4	16.3	7.4	28.6	20.6
Child's Friend*	8.0	27.2	19.1	14.3	18.7
Teachers*	56.9	27.7	16.2	28.6	35.5
School Shares Values*	35.0	18.5	10.3	50.0	24.7
Transportation*	9.5	46.7	33.8	32.1	31.4
Racial/Ethnic Mix*	34.3	14.1	8.8	14.3	19.9
Special Programs*	72.3	24.5	30.9	53.6	43.2
Individual Help*	37.2	6.0	13.2	25.0	18.7
Safety*	27.7	10.3	4.4	7.1	14.9
Principal	18.2	19.0	10.3	25.0	17.7
Smaller Class Size*	24.1	4.3	5.9	7.1	11.3
Before/After Care	14.6	15.2	11.8	28.6	15.3
Discipline*	25.5	12.5	5.9	3.6	15.1
Near Job	5.8	14.7	11.8	14.3	11.3
Like the Neighborhood*	0.7	24.5	2.9	0.0	11.5
Near Child Care*	1.5	9.2	2.9	0.0	5.0
Special Needs Services	18.2	17.9	25.0	32.1	20.1
Another Child at School	29.2	25.0	17.6	42.9	26.4

*$p < 0.05$

Note: No teacher in the school-within-school (SWS) programs taught only non-magnet students.

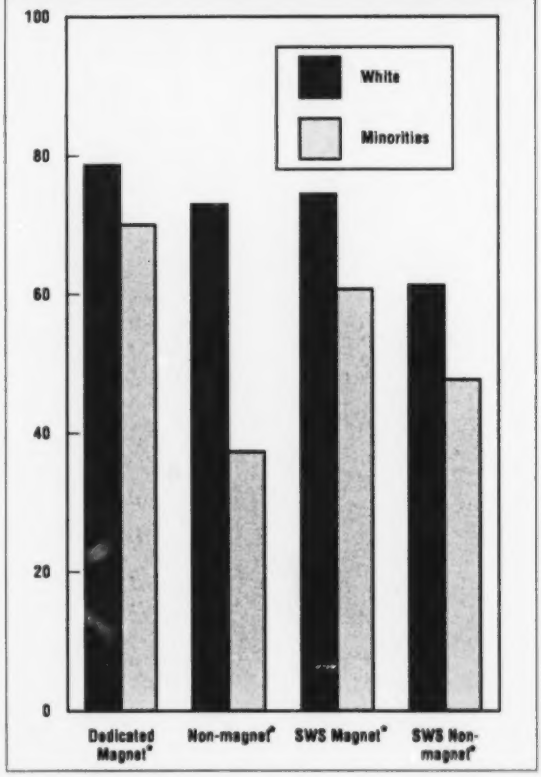
Table F6: Mean Results for Communal Opportunities to Learn (1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often)				
	Magnet	**Non-magnet**	**School-within-school Magnet**	**School-within-school Non-magnet**
Parent/Parent Interactions	1.97	2.01	1.70	1.66
Parent Involvement	2.21	2.25	2.30	1.87
Parent Influence	2.26	2.15	1.94	1.83
Amount of Information	2.54	2.47	2.28	2.17
School Climate	3.11	2.87	2.77	2.60

Figure G1: Family Income: Percent of Families with Annual Income Below $15,000



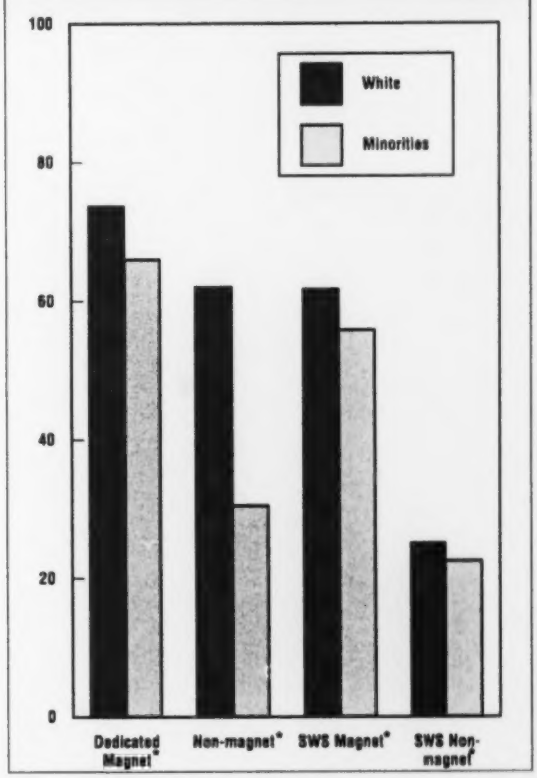
* School-within-school

Figure G2: Family Structure: Percent of Two-parent Families



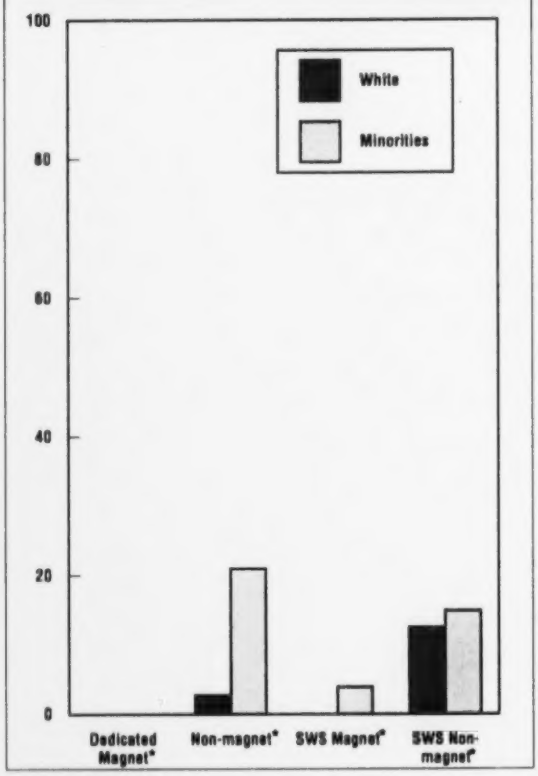
* School-within-school

Figure G3: Parent Education: Percent of Families with at Least One Parent Who Has a College Degree



* School-within-school

Figure G4: Parent Unemployment: Percent of Families with Both Parents Unemployed



* School-within-school

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